

## A Burnt Hill Park Adventure

Welcome, fellow adventurers, to another outing, this time at the lovely 171-acre Burnt Hill Park located off of East Street. For those of you yet to visit this one-of-a-kind, multi-use, town-owned Park, expect quite an adventure!

Upon entrance to the Park, a former chicken egg farm, take notice of the historic, stately Peters House. This landmark former residence hosts Hebron's annual Juneteenth celebration as well as monthly meetings of Hebron's Historic Properties Commission. This town-owned beauty is linked to Hebron's inclusion on the Connecticut Freedom Trail and is envisioned to host an array of public events and gatherings in the future as renovations to this cultural asset progress along towards completion. Stop by, when open, and take an inside tour sometime!

Onward we go. The adventurer passes by the first athletic field, one of the Park's several, beautifully maintained fields seemingly always in joyful use. At this junction, a bit ahead of us, sits the Parks office and maintenance building, but let's take a left here. As we proceed along this curved access drive, notice how the Park was so thoughtfully landscaped with beneficial native trees and bushes of many species, spaced with precision, providing an exquisite border to the playfields within its bounds. Wow, look at this, a spacious pavilion with many tables inviting us for a picnic! Well, next time, let's bring lunch!

Proceeding further along, a concession stand, restroom facilities and a remembrance garden greet the visitor. Let's park here and start our hike. A wide grass path invites us past the Park's water feature, a pond, as we ascend steadily uphill. Check out all the native species of pollinator plants! How many can you identify? I see an abundance of goldenrods and asters, vital as late-in-the-season nutrients for our pollinator friends. Patches of milkweed thrive here as well, necessary for survival of the spectacular orange and black Monarch Butterfly, now, sadly, an endangered species. Arriving at the top of this high hill, a grand view to the southwest can be had. Quite stunning, I say! Traversing the green carpeted path we come to a decision point. At your left is a woodland trail and to your right continues our wide grass path. I can take you to both, but not at the same time of course!

Taking the grass path downgradient, out pops a bunny ... and another, and then a third! Aren't they so darn cute? Proceeding a few gentle steps ahead ... no, wait, we have to stop for a moment to take in a swirling display of swallows. Diving and darting, up, down, sideways with blazing speed and precision, these avian acrobats chase down their late afternoon prey. Such an amazing, mesmerizing sight, how do they communicate and not collide? I just don't know, another nature's mystery.

This winding path leads us further downhill to the opposite end of the pond and onto the sidelines of the Park's football field where kids are at practice honing their skills, solidifying



friendships and accumulating youth memories to reflect upon in the adult years ahead. Walking along this "field of dreams", we parallel the Park's woodland trail, the abandoned Skinner Lane. Encircling the remaining field perimeter, we can head back to our waiting vehicle where we encounter a pick-up baseball game. Ok, I think I will take this in a bit ... ahh, so very nice to see parents and youngsters playing America's game with such joy. I wish I could join in!

Now, as promised, back to the other trek around the Park from the top of the hill. A woodland path leads the adventurer southerly through an assortment of native trees. Upon its endpoint, a right turn leads us to the west along the aforementioned abandoned Slocum Road, now a nice walking trail. Standing guard over the trail are several specimen and otherwise elder Beech trees. Do you recognize this important nut producing tree? Its distinctive gray skin is smooth and cool to the touch. Go ahead, gently touch, they won't mind!

As one revels in the glimmering sunshine continuing along this tree lined path, an opening in the forest reveals an expanse of grassland. Although an adventure for another time, this open space area abuts Holbrook Pond at its eastern border, hosts a scenic in-use farm field, and, as a bonus, holds another woodland trail which leads us back to Skinner Lane (across from the aforementioned "field of dreams").

Hope you enjoyed this adventure at Hebron's unique, extraordinary multi-use Burnt Hill Park, so well planned, constructed and maintained, a regional draw for all to visit!

Frank Zitkus

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Editor's note: This park was purchased with Hebron's Open Space Land Acquisition Funds supplemented by a State of Connecticut DEEP Open Space Grant. So grateful for these resources!