

Guide to Meadow Pond Trail

By Doug Raasch

If we ever have an election to pick our favorite Hagerman walks, Meadow Pond Trail will be, without a doubt, chosen "best all around." Meadow Pond walk is everything that Hagerman Wildlife Refuge has to offer in one place.

First realize that the full adventure is over six miles. That would be three miles in and three out, plus a few short side trips. The full trek is recommended because the trail gets more interesting as you progress towards the end.

To reach the trail, from the Visitor Center, turn right as you exit the driveway and then left onto Wildlife Drive and continue about 2 miles until the road T's. You will be looking straight down Meadow Pond trail as you approach the "T." You can park at the trailhead or in the day use area on the right. A restroom is available.

After passing through the turnstile, you will be walking down a cool, shady lane with trees on both sides. This is an excellent place to see and hear song birds. The trail is perfectly flat the entire way because we are following the rail bed that once was the lifeblood of the town of Hagerman. The berms that occasionally shelter the trail are left over from rail bed construction. The track basically follows Mineral Creek on the north which adds variety to the wildlife habitat. You will notice short little trails that lead to photo opportunities. Nesting boxes along the trail attract bluebirds, wrens, titmice, chickadees and Prothonotary warblers each spring and summer.

Walking less than ½ mile from the starting point, the view opens up on the left and Deaver Pond will reliably harbor a few wading birds for you to watch. A bench built as an Eagle Scout project offers an opportunity for a rest stop. And by the way, Deaver is not a typo for Beaver, it is the name of a previous landowner.

Walking on, the trees return and the sheltered trail seems to provide a byway for wildlife. Deer and turkeys are willing to share this man-made lane and don't seem overly concerned by hikers. Open fields on the south side of the trail along the way often provide a glimpse the two species out foraging on green vegetation. Also, be on the lookout for roadrunners along the path.

If you notice the concrete barriers that cap each end of the old water control structures near the bridges, check out the stamp on the outside. Each culvert has a large 1913 date impressed into the concrete. Let your imagination take over and think of the men who built this track with a pick and shovel in hot Texas weather about 100 years ago. In your reverie, don't be shocked if the ground begins to shake with train noises. The modern day Union Pacific track runs just south of the trail and still carries trains throughout the day.

At the two mile marker is the namesake Meadow Pond, dried up by years of drought. If and when water returns to the pond, expect to view raptors, wading birds, vultures, and possibly wild hogs as well as American Lotus which take over the pond in summer months. Some will turn back, but the real explorers will trudge on to the somewhat symbolic spot where the old and new tracks come together just ahead. The path makes a small loop down to Mineral Creek and back to the trail. The loop is at the three mile mark. Explore the creek before turning back.

Enjoy your three-mile walk back ! Looking for birds on both sides of the trail will keep you busy and help pass the time. You won't be disappointed.