

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, follow Wildlife Drive southwest along the lake about 2 miles to the yellow gate, where the road T's. You will be looking straight down Meadow Pond Trail as you approach the “T.” You can park at the trail head or in the day use area on the right. A restroom is available.

After passing through the gate, you will be walking down a cool, shady lane with trees on both sides. This is an excellent place to see and hear songbirds. The trail is perfectly flat the entire way because you are following the rail bed that once was the lifeblood of the village 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.

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. During a recent walk, the pond was taken over by about 40 vultures that seemed to be feeding on fish that were victims of the drought. 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.

The one mile point is a roadway that takes off to your left (east). Unless you are just walking for exercise, this is not a unique walk and, therefore, not a good use of your time. Don't forget your one mile point is a two mile hike.

If you notice the concrete barriers that cap each end of the old water shed culverts (creek crossings under the trail), 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 in Texas weather with pick and shovel almost 100 years ago. In that day, World War I was not even considered possible. In your reverie, don't be shocked if the ground begins to shake with train noises. The modern day Union Pacific track runs just east of our trail and still supports trains throughout the day.

The two mile marker is the namesake Meadow Pond. Expect to view raptors, wading birds, and sometimes even wild pigs. Some will turn back, but the real explorers will trudge on to the somewhat symbolic spot where the old and new tracks come together. 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. The wild pigs love to frolic in the mud in the low areas.

Cottonmouth snakes have also been seen along the roadway near the ponds. Red clover and gallardia are plentiful in the Spring. Many different types of ducks and shorebirds can also be seen, in season, in the ponds. Look for wild turkey and coyotes in open fields along the trail.

The only thing left to do is to walk the three miles back. Looking for birds on both sides of the trail will keep you busy and help pass the time. You won't be disappointed.

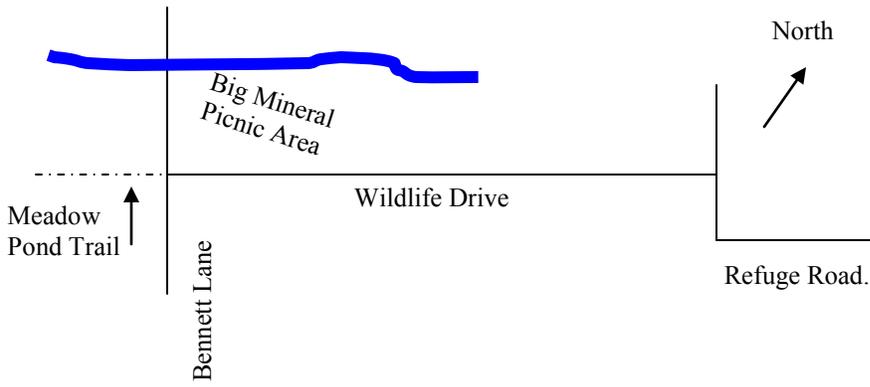
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Hiking Hagerman Series

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Directions to Meadow Pond Trailhead