



Town of Greenwich
Department of Parks & Recreation
Town Hall - 101 Field Point Road - Greenwich, CT 06836-2540
Phone: (203) 622-7814 – Fax: (203) 622-6494

BRUCE PARK

Approximately 60 acres

DIRECTIONS:

I-95 Southbound Exit 4, turn left onto Indian Field Road. Turn right onto Bruce Park Drive, follow to park. I-95 Northbound Exit 3, turn right onto Arch Street, follow to Museum Drive, turn left onto Davis Avenue, follow to park.

RECREATIONAL USE:

A variety of activities are possible in Bruce Park, including walking and jogging on a marked and measured trail, bicycling, and picnicking. The Greenwich Lawn Bowling Association maintains a bowling green and organizes games. Three tennis courts, horseshoe pits, a baseball diamond, and playgrounds are also available. Permits are required for the use of the baseball diamond. Please contact the Recreation Division at 622-7830 for fees and availability.

A series of lovely ponds and wooded areas provide for passive activities. Picnic areas are provided with tables and grills. Permits are required for groups over 25 for the Woods Road picnic area. Please contact the Parks and Trees Division at 622-7824 for fees and availability.

It came into being in 1908 when wealthy textile merchant Robert M. Bruce transferred by Deed of Conveyance to the Town almost 100 acres including his house which he designated for a "Natural History, Historical and Art Museum". A provision in the Deed allowed for part of his gift to be used "for the purpose of a public highway". This came to fruition with the advent of I-95 in 1958, and moneys derived from the sale were used to add a small addition to the Museum and to purchase land for the Bruce Golf Course.

Geologic features of most of the Bruce Park area are outcroppings of a formation known as the Harrison Gneiss (pronounced "nice") which also underlies most of Greenwich and Cos Cob Harbors. Dating from approximately 450 million years ago, these rocks have a layered and folded appearance, caused by a series of geologic upheavals over millions of years which produced tremendous levels of heat and pressure within the earth thereby allowing the various minerals to align into layers.

The park is at its best in the spring with lovely beds of daffodils, magnificent plantings of azaleas and dogwoods (the stretch along Steamboat Road below the Museum is noted for its alternating pink and white dogwoods) which all bloom at the same time. As the spring blossoms fade, the rose garden begins to bloom and provides a colorful display for the balance of the spring and summer. One can easily retreat to the adjacent gazebo (courtesy of the Hortulus Garden Club) to soak in the beauty of this well-manicured garden.

After the flowers are gone, one may enjoy taking a tree guide in hand to explore the wonderful variety of species throughout the Park. Sweetgum, various maples, oaks and evergreens are common, with a few ginkos and sequoias.

Most notable of the fauna throughout the park, and especially in the vicinity of the Museum, are the black squirrels, a variant of the common gray squirrel. In addition, the park provides a variety of environments for both resident and migratory species.

There are a number of interesting sculptures on the Museum grounds and throughout the park. The Museum features a 35-foot Tsimshian Totem Pole carved by David Boxley and commissioned by Dr. and Mrs. Raymond Sackler to commemorate The Bruce Museum's 75th Anniversary. A cassette tape relating the legend of the pole is available through the Museum's receptionist.

Also on Museum grounds are a bronze work entitled "Obelisk Head" by Elizabeth Strong-Cuevas and an aluminum work entitled "Searching for Peace" by Luis Arata.

There are also two works permanently placed in the park. The first, "Girl Standing in Nature" by George Segal is at the north end of Woods Road in the center of the park. It was a gift of the Greenwich Arts Council and part of their Sculpture '76 celebration, in honor of the 350th Anniversary of the Town. The Greenwich Arts Council commissioned Deborah Butterfield to create "Orson and Valentine", the pair of bronze horses that now grace the meadow near the lawn bowling court.

Finally, it should be noted that The Bruce Museum sponsors two major outdoor festivals annually. The Outdoor Arts Festival is held in October on Columbus Day weekend and the Outdoor Crafts Festival is held each May. Each festival features 75 juried artists from around the country as well as entertainment, demonstrations and food. Each of the festivals attract 10,000 visitors, weather permitting.

John B. Clark

NATURAL FEATURES:

Bruce Park is very scenic with its ponds, lawns, rose garden, and small naturally wooded areas. Select trees along the road are labeled by species. Ducks, geese, swans and gulls occupy the ponds, and other small birds can be spotted. Rolling hills divide the park into a number of separate, naturally occurring sub-units that provide a sense of privacy unusual in a town park. Rock outcrops and high ledges border the ponds. The southernmost high area overlooks Indian Harbor.

HISTORY BEYOND ACQUISITION:

The southern area nearest the Sound was used as a summer camping ground by members of the Siwanoy tribe before Europeans came to settle in this area. Heaps of clam and oyster shells and projectile points indicate that Native Americans occupied the area over a long period of time.

In the early days of colonial occupation, a tide mill for grinding grain was located on the upper end of Indian Harbor where Chimney Corner Creek emptied into the millpond. Elisha Davis was the owner/operator and the road which runs in front of the park gets its name from him. The mill operated almost until 1900. The millstones can still be found near the site.

PARK DEVELOPMENT:

Robert Bruce, a Scotsman who made his fortune in dealing in wool imported from Scotland, bought the land in town that now comprises Bruce Park specifically to develop outing grounds for the public. The land was a marsh with tangled bush and decayed tree land before the land was turned over to the Town, Bruce developed the land. A landscape architect was called in and hundreds of workers helped to scoop out marshes to create ponds and raise the surrounding land, fill in ravines and plant diverse shrubbery.

The old mill was removed and the pond dammed to make boating and swimming possible. A large bathhouse was built on the Mill Pond for the convenience of ladies. About three miles of drives that wound around ponds, meadows, over hills and by groves and rocks were laid out for carriage outings. Also picnic grounds and meadows for tennis and croquet were created. In an

article in The Greenwich Graphic, a newspaper then in existence, noted that "...as time goes on, more and more will the Town recognize the farsightedness, thoughtfulness and kindness that prompted this noble gift on the part of the public-spirited man whose name will live as long as the Town lasts and the park remains."

Bruce shelter and in 1928, staff headquarters for the new Department of Recreation. It was demolished in 1958 when the thruway was built. Bruce Park was used for a variety of activities during its early history. Tracts were available to residents for gardens during World War I, a dog pound was built in 1925, and crowds gathered for ice skating, baseball games were held there, an occasional traveling circus stopped and the community gathered for fireworks displays.

Ernest Thompson Seaton, the founder of the Boy Scouts of America, had afternoon and evening powwows in the area where the playground is now located. The Woodland Indians, as they were called then, recited poems and prayers from Indian lore around campfires.

In 1945, Joseph Dietrich the new Superintendent of Parks & Trees began a series of improvements to attract more people to the underutilized park. The McArdle Seed Company donated and planted 5,000 tulips. When these became diseased, a rose garden was substituted. The new plan for the planting of azaleas, rhododendrons and other flowering shrubs to enhance the beauty of the park. A picnic area was developed and it too attracted more people to the park.

In 1955 the first modern park playground in Greenwich was constructed in Bruce Park. Equipment that would appeal to children was installed in a natural setting. Other recreational improvements through the years have included a jogging exercise trail, a lawn-bowling green, tennis courts and a baseball diamond.

Bruce also bought property with a house on Steamboat Road which went to the Town after his death. The total given acreage for Bruce Park to be used forever as a public park was about 100 acres. His house on Steamboat Road became the Bruce Museum of Natural History, History and Art. Another house, "Memorial Home", was built as an affordable vacation home for working girls and used for years. Later it became a nursery home.