



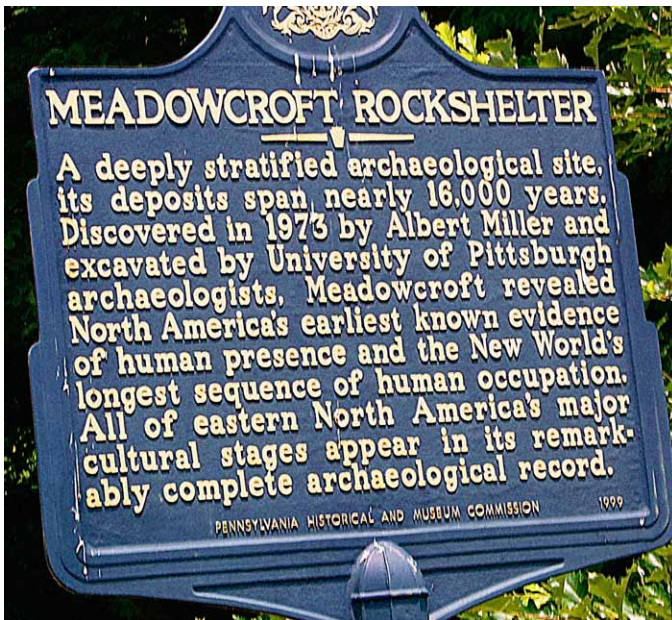
# THE ROAD TO THE MEADOWS:

16,000 YEARS OF CAMPFIRES, CHERRY PIES, TROLLEY CARS, TRAIL RIDES AND PA'S BELOVED FATHER OF HARNESS RACING.

WASHINGTON COUNTY THE MEADOWS RACETRACK AND CASINO

A personal odyssey to the hidden gems along the way.

**O**ur roadtrip begins 16,000 years ago, after a lovely winding ride along a very rural Route 50 toward the West Virginia border. We're en route to the homestead of local hero [Delvin Miller](#), known around here as the father of American harness racing. His story's worth telling, but it's what his brother Albert found on the family farm that drives us forward into the past.



The site of a 16,000-year old cook-out, discovered by a curious dog.

Albert is walking his dog along the Cross Creek when ol' Blue chases a groundhog down its hole and digs up Indian arrowheads, crude tools and other artifacts of ancient social networking in the process. (Never did find the groundhog.) One dig leads to the next and - eureka - the oldest continually inhabited spot by human folk on the North American continent.

The archeologists tell us people have been coming to this spot called the [Meadowcroft Rockshelter](#) for nigh on 16,000 years. ("It was like a Paleo motel," says one of our guides.) That's 1,600 centuries of fishing trips,

hunting parties, family picnics, campfires and every manner of post-ice-age barbecues. All now protected by a dramatic wooden enclosure more [Frank Lloyd Wright](#) than pre-Clovis paleontology.

Even for us lay folk, who think the patched denim jacket we just found balled up in the back of the rag-top trunk is old, this place is a certified jaw dropper. They've been digging around here with tiny little razor blades since the '70s - which seems long enough - and they've gotten through about a third of the sandstone that's given up countless prehistoric treasures.

A couple stones throw away, on this same piece of property, is the Meadowcroft Museum of Rural Life. We stroll through a frontier town, check out the squash growing in a 400-year old Indian village garden and land inside two galleries that tell the stories of the Miller brothers who put this spot on the map.



Delvin Miller, a local boy made good, raced (and won) over the course of 8 decades.

Albert was a gifted photographer, and his chronicles of old-time rural living fill a beautiful gallery. Next door, a story of one of the great sportsmen of any archeological era comes to life. Albert's brother [Delvin Miller](#) drove his first racehorse when he was a teen, and kept at it till he died at the age of 83. The room is chock-

a-block with sulkies, loving cups, regal proclamations and amazing memories. It's a one-man hall of fame from the most romantic era of sports.

After gawking through a few generations of geological and harness racing ephemera we put images of flint arrowheads and riding silks in our rear view. We have a desire to hop a streetcar at the [Pennsylvania Trolley Museum](#) down near [The Meadows Racetrack](#), our feature destination. (Did we mention that it was Delvin Miller himself who founded that beautiful racing oval back in '63?)

Alas, like the best laid plans, ours is interrupted, this time by hungry happenstance along the two-lane. We do a double take at an art deco filling station now reborn as a bakery with the tastiest pies this side of the [Wellsboro Diner](#). Their aroma fills the air, so of course we bang a uey to have a looksee.



*Sweetest u-turn we ever made.*

[The Pie Place](#) has rolled 'em out for more than 15 years now, and we cannot tell a lie: the crimson cherry pie with the lattice-work lard crust is so tempting we don't make it out of the parking lot. We devour the whole enchilada right off the ragtop's trunk.

Wipe the last speck of cherry filling from the corner of our smile and we finally make it to the Trolley Museum. Yup, there she is, the very same streetcar named Desire made famous onstage by good ole [Stanley Kowalski](#). To this day it inspires cries of "Stella!" from many who happen upon this big old trolley barn.

Desire is part of a collection of more than 40 antique trolley cars, most of 'em painstakingly restored and gleaming with nostalgia. Motorman Walt Copland welcomes us aboard for a trundle through the nearby



*Motorman Walt Copland takes us on a trolley trundle thru the woods.*

woods and meadows. He tells stories of the bygones and answers every question with a wink and a smile.

By now the light is late-afternoon lush, and we hop off the trolley just in time for the first post at [The Meadows](#), where our potential fortune (and a couple cold trackside brews) awaits our arrival.

This place is beautiful and bustling. Gentlemen sport Irish caps and chew pencils while they study racing forms. Kids ride on dads' shoulders up and down the rail, pointing at one splendid horse after another. It's colorful; a carnival atmosphere festive with families who keep Delvin Miller's equine vision alive and trotting.

Aha! A pacer from Pennsylvania's great [Hanover Shoe Farms](#) is listed in the first race. So we plop down two bucks on Big Time Hanover to win and then claim a spot with the railbirds down where they finish.

The bugle calls the horses to the post and the reverie raises back-neck goosebumps. The thrill never gets old, especially when Big Time Hanover comes thumping from the outside to take the lead at the  $\frac{3}{4}$  mark with [just enough oomph to hold on past the wire](#). We hop



*Never underestimate a horse from Hanover.*

and holler and wave our winning ticket. The Hanover horse pays \$4.20; the next cold beer is on the house.

We stay through the 8th, the big feature race, where we put our faith on another pacer from our favorite place. This time he's a big fella by the name of [Dagnabit Hanover](#). He's won two in a row, but this evening, dag nabit, he can't make it three. All in all, though, we did alright.

Turns out watching all those horses run around in ovals pushes our hungry and thirsty buttons. So we find happiness in the tavern room at [Palazzo 1837 Ristorante](#), a new-school Italian in a beautiful old-school brick building just down the road a piece.



*Is it the lime or the phosphate that makes the Lime Phosphate so refreshing?*

Matt Sager holds court at the bar here and mixes a varied menu of mean vintage cocktails. (His wife Susan manages their downtown Pittsburgh outpost; we make a mental note to stop and say hello.) We quaff one of Matt's speakeasy [Lime Phosphates](#) (caution: they go down too easy) and savor a mélange of sautéed sea scallops and oxymoronic jumbo shrimp. Roadtrip dinners seem best

eaten at the bar, where conversation with locals usually digs up tomorrow's unexpected treasures. No exception this time, as Matt boasts of a wood-burning pizza oven just up Route 19 in Mt. Lebanon.

Lucky for us [Il Pizzaiolo](#) is just a few clicks from bucolic [Rolling Hills Ranch](#), where a gentle saddle horse named Forbes takes us for a morning ride through the woods. We clip-clop beneath the forest canopy and dream of driving a Hanover champion to the winner's circle at The Meadows. After a very pleasant hour or so, we prepare to chow down on Neapolitan pizza topped with baby arugula and oh-so-thin prosciutto.



*Our friend Forbes.*

The itinerary is tight. We've still got a barn full of [Alpacas](#) to discover, a tour of a [dairy farm](#) to take (and their ice cream to scream about) and a night to spend at yet another [working farm](#) where we'll help pitch hay, milk a cow and sleep like 16,000-year old rocks. But that's a whole other story yet to tell.

In the meantime, we'll look for you around the bends and back roads.

For more adventures of  
**The Shunpiker's Guide**, poke  
around at [visitpa.com/shunpiker](http://visitpa.com/shunpiker).

What to see, where to go, what to eat before it's too late.

## 1 Hog Father's Old Fashioned BBQ

Not far south of The Meadows we're tempted by the siren's aroma of smoky pulled pork wafting over the roofless chamber of the ragtop. It recalls our first rule of roadtripping: If you smell smoke, pull over. It might be barbecue.

At about the same sweet instant we smell that roasted pig, we see the big black and gold sign: Hog Father's Old Fashioned BBQ. We follow our nose and find a shady spot to park along the side.



Inside, the Hog father's décor is pretty basic. A young gal shows us a table but we fill a couple vacant stools at the small counter. She brings us a nice cold Yuengling and a menu. It's all over the map: Southern fried chicken, St. Louis ribs, spicy Italian sausage, and ahh...the old fashioned pulled pork sandwich.

The bbq staple comes with a choice of "spicy red" or "Carolina" sauce. And the fella pulling the pork insists on putting some crispy onion rings right on the sandwich (where the slaw's supposed to go). Old Hog Father himself has a contrarian point of view.

We go with Carolina (always trust the vinegar), and a side of slaw, for which we find room inside the sandwich, and with one bite we're quite proud of what's in our mouth. Maybe the menu doesn't have a clear focus, but that pulled pork sure knows exactly what it wants to do. It wants to make us happy.

When on the road to or from The Meadows, and you're hungry as a horse, do the right thing. Smell your way over to Jefferson Avenue in Washington, PA and wolf down some Hog Father's. You can check 'em out on Facebook or grab a looksee at the menu [here](#).

*1301 Jefferson Ave Washington, PA 15301 • 724-229-1227*

## 2 The Peek-A-Boo Igloo



We're on the way to an afternoon post time at The Meadows when we can't help but do a doubletake at the igloo up ahead. Just the site of this vintage ice cream

stand is refreshing. We order up a root beer float and ask about the history of the parlor. The gal inside says, "Oh it's just the owner's most favorite thing. This was his dream for ages." Well, for a couple of intrepid TrackPackers, this wonderful little place was a dream come true during the latest heat wave. (Oh yeah, there's a go-cart track for your own personal racing right out back. Probably best to finish your soft serve first.)

*501 Racetrack Road, Meadow Lands, PA 15347  
724-222-5554 • <http://tinyurl.com/29vt5cq>*

### 3 Meadowcroft Rockshelter

A strange and intoxicating combination of wonders, including an archeological dig of 16,000 years of human habitation, the multi-village Museum of Rural Life, the Albert Miller photo collection and a shrine to his brother Delvin, the father of North American harness racing. Unreal but true in beautiful Avella, PA.



401 Meadowcroft Rd Avella, PA 15312 • 412.221.9926  
<http://bit.ly/dpK9C8>

### 4 Weatherbury Farm Vacation Bed and Breakfast

How about a vacation with chores? But only if you wanna. Help Farmer Dale putter about the farm, or his wife Marcy weed the gardens. Or better yet, relax and enjoy the fresh air, a cozy carriage house suite, and legendary home cooking.

1061 Sugar Run Rd Avella, PA 15312 • 412.221.9926  
[www.weatherburyfarm.com](http://www.weatherburyfarm.com)

### 5 Rolling Hills Ranch



Make time for a moonlight ride on a fine horse. (We love a big brown there called Forbes.) Includes campfire dinner and a hayride. (BYOB.) Or stop by just about anytime for a clip-clop along rolling wooded hills overlooking the Pittsburgh skyline. Beautiful.

677 Hickory Grade Rd. Bridgeville, PA 15017  
412.221.9926 • [www.rolling-hills-ranch.com](http://www.rolling-hills-ranch.com)

### 6 Il Pizzaiolo



The authentic wood-burning brick oven (shipped in pieces from Naples, then put back together again) fires up to 1,000 degrees. The fabulous thin crust pies bake to perfection in just 90 seconds! And wait till you get a load of the genuine buffalo mozzarella. Great beer and wine list, too.

703 Washington Rd. (Rt.19) Mt Lebanon, PA 15228  
412.344.4123 • <http://bit.ly/bWwhbB>

### 7 The Spring House Market and Dairy Farm



This is the real deal. A great farmers market, a fabulous family restaurant (try to wrap your hands around a home-baked "carving ham" sandwich) and a tour of the dairy farm where just about

everything they serve is grown. All woven together by a truly uplifting family story.

1531 Route 136 Washington, PA 15301 • 724.228.3339  
[www.springhousemarket.com](http://www.springhousemarket.com) (Ask for Jane; she's the best.)

### 8 The Pie Place



Cupcakes, lady locks, cream horns, pecan tarts, pumpkin squares, macaroons, pepperoni rolls and deep dish fruit pies to beat the band: 'nuff said.

737 West Pike St. Houston, PA 15342 • 610.892.7260  
[www.thepieplaceofhouston.com](http://www.thepieplaceofhouston.com)

### 9 Palazzo 1837 Ristorante

Chef Adam Smith makes magic in this new/old school Italian kitchen. Behind the cozy tavern bar, Matt Sager shakes up top-shelf roaring '20s cocktails with fresh fruit and home-made mixers. Tip back a Vanilla & Rye or a Bloody Bull before your lasagna or French-cut ribeye. Around the corner from The Meadows.

1445 Washington Rd. Washington, PA 15301  
724-223-1837 • [www.palazzorestaurants.com](http://www.palazzorestaurants.com)

### 10 The Meadows Racetrack



The great Delvin Miller founded this historic racing oval nearly 50 years ago. Since then The Meadows has earned a place among the best harness tracks in the world, and the annual

running of the Adios Stakes is a traditional family thrill. Just off Route 79 in Canonsburg, PA • (724) 225-9300  
[www.trackpackpa.com/find-a-track](http://www.trackpackpa.com/find-a-track)

### 11 The Pennsylvania Trolley Museum



Take a ride into America's most romantic era of light rail transportation. Sounds like geeky fun, and it sure is! Just around the corner from The Meadows.

1 Museum Rd Washington, PA 15301 • 724.228.9256  
[www.pa-trolley.org](http://www.pa-trolley.org)



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