

Fall Color Audio Tour Transcript

West Side Loop 1—Lake Marmo

[Narrator] Welcome to this driving tour of the Arboretum's West Side. The West Side has two loops. This is loop one, which takes you past Lake Marmo. you'll need to veer off on the alternate route just after Thornhill.

[Narrator] Please take a few minutes to adjust your volume now. This tour works best when experienced between 10 and 15 miles per hour. While you shouldn't have to adjust your audio too much, you'll have a chance at each of the major landmarks on this route to pause and continue. In the meantime, be sure to follow all posted signs and rules of the road.

[Music]

[Barb] Hello, my name is Barb and I'll be with you on this portion of the trip. We are on the West Side, the original 600 acres of land that Mr. Morton purchased from local farmers to create this one space. As we go up the hill on our left we're going to see flowering trees. Those are mostly crabapples—there's a couple of magnolias—in the spring these trees bloom beautiful with red, pink, and white flowers.

[Barb] On our right you're going to see a wetland. Again, native grasses and plants that do bloom throughout each of the seasons. Now we're coming slowly up the hill and looking on the left you're going to notice a clearing and it has a path. Mr. Morton came in 1910. He was with us until he passed away in the mid-1930s. But while he was here, he spent about a good 20 years on the grounds. He really enjoyed the Arboretum—he loved the land, he loved everything about it. He didn't want to leave. Now what do you do when you own 600 acres of land and you don't want to leave? Well, of course, you build your family cemetery! And that's what he did. What you're seeing is Mr. Morton's cemetery.

[Barb] At one time this hilltop was covered with hawthorn trees. So as Mr. Morton was creating his home, he needed to name it. So he chose the name "Thornhill" for the hawthorne trees at the top of the hill you'll notice a white building. That is our education center, also named Thornhill. Mr. Morton had his home where we currently have our education center. As you go further down another one of our drivers will take you further into the wooded area and on to more adventures at the Arboretum. Thank you for joining me and enjoy the rest of your trip.

[Narrator] You should be nearing the Thornhill parking lot. The next section of the tour begins there. Feel free to pause and pull over if you're running ahead or tap on number two if you're running behind. You will need to veer left on the alternate route to Lake Marmo just ahead.

[Music]

[Scott] Hey, Scott here. We are going to be heading away from the Thornhill Education Center and we immediately come to a fork in the road. And that fork in the road off to the right would take us to the Schulenberg Prairie—certainly worth a visit—but we are going to head down to Lake Marmo today.

[Scott] Lake Marmo is one of the first lakes that Joy Morton built here on the property. There are eight lakes here on the property and Lake Marmo was actually started in 1923. And so as we head down into this little valley here, when Joy Morton bought the property there was a little stream that ran through this little valley that we're heading into. And so he decided that it would be a beautiful spot to position a lake. He hired folks to come in and dredge along this little stream, built a spillway down on the east end, and that lake filled up and he named it Lake Marmo after his wife, Margaret Martin.

[Scott] And as we continue down the road, heading through an oak savannah here on the property, if you look off to the left there's a huge old oak tree here and it's quite a famous tree in Illinois. It is the Millennium Landmark Tree. Among all of the trees in Illinois our beautiful white oak was selected as the Millennium Tree for the state of Illinois in the year 2000. Quite an amazing honor. The tree is about 250 years old.

[Scott] Well, as we pass the area where the Millennium Tree is we see Lake Marmo but if you look across Lake Marmo you are going to see just a beautiful vista. First you'll see redbuds that bloom in the springtime, beautiful purple blooms, and then marching up the hill behind those redbud trees are huge stands of spruce trees and arborvitae—quite an amazing plot of trees that Joy Morton and the staff planted early in the history of The Morton Arboretum.

[Scott] We are going to be heading towards parking area 27 which is right here by Lake Marmo and it is one of the spots that I would have a tendency to park quite often because right across the road from parking area 27 is my dad's tribute tree! Ken Wessel. And we dedicated a tree to my father back in 1998 and you also can dedicate trees and benches and patio bricks to a family member, a loved one, a friend, and it is a great way to support The Morton Arboretum's work.

[Scott] We head down the road and we see Hemlock Hill, great spot to head out on some of our 16 miles of hiking trails that we have here at The Morton Arboretum. It's hard to describe the vast expanse of trails that we have here but certainly worth a visit if you get an opportunity to come to the West Side or the East Side. Park your car on one of the, oh, I think 33 different parking lots that we have here at The Morton Arboretum and go for a hike in the prairies, the savannas, the woodlands, or the forests.

[Music]

[Scott] So we continue our ride down around lake marmo and we come to the Bobolink Meadow. Now this is just an amazing spot to visit. It's kind of a grassland, in a way; it is a managed area here at The Morton Arboretum but in the springtime we let the grass grow tall and the reason that we do that is

because we're inviting the bobolinks to come back and nest here at The Morton Arboretum. They are a well-traveled bird and they like to nest in tall grasses or hay fields.

[Scott] And where have they been all winter long? Sometimes on a 15,000-mile journey! Because after they have finished nesting here, they leave this beautiful nesting area and they head back to Central and South America that's where they travel to. Sometimes they'll fly 100, 200, 300, 400 miles in a day. And then they'll rest for a few days and then continue their journey. So we always leave those grasslands tall here in the spring and the summer for those beautiful bobolinks.

[Scott] And I certainly hope you've enjoyed it here and I hope you come out to visit The Morton Arboretum soon. Thanks, folks!

[Music]

[Narrator] You should be nearing the junction near parking lot 30. The next section of the tour begins there. Feel free to pause and pull over if you're running ahead or tap on number three if you're running behind.

[Cindy] Well hello! My name is Cindy and for the past seven years I've had the pleasure of driving the tram and sharing nature's secrets here at Morton Arboretum.

[Cindy] Notice the many birch saplings that are planted here as we enter the birch collection. People usually identify a birch tree with a white peeling bark and the leaves in the fall will turn a soft lemony color. Unfortunately the white birch are susceptible to a number of diseases and typically survive only 20 to 30 years. A good alternative choice is the river birch. Look for the Fox Valley river birch on the left side near the bottom of the hill. Note the shape of this tree. A young lad told me once it reminded him of a head of broccoli! It's not too tall, compact and round shape and the best thing is you don't have to prune this tree; this is the way this tree will grow.

[Cindy] Now this tree is a selection of Chicagoland Grows, which is a partnership of Morton Arboretum, Chicago Botanical Garden, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois. These three organizations work together to develop new plants that are good for urban and suburban landscapes. Chicagoland Grows began in 1986 and the Arboretum has introduced 15 new trees and shrubs to the market. Every time someone purchases a plant with the Chicagoland Grows trademark, a portion of the proceeds come back to the Arboretum to reinvest in future plant development.

[Cindy] A beautiful pair of Miyabi maples will cover the road as we enter the plant evaluation area known as Godshalk Meadow. Clarence Godshalk began working for Mr. Morton right after college and for the next 40 years he worked a multitude of jobs. Eventually he assumed position of director after Joy Morton passed in 1934. The Arboretum has a large research component and this area is used to try new plants on the market.

[Cindy] Every day, every trail is a rewarding experience. For just a little while take a break from your daily routine and refresh yourself with nature. Thank you for supporting The Morton Arboretum.

[Narrator] This concludes loop one of the West Side tour. If you would like to take the other loop around the West Side that takes you past the Prairie Visitor Station, cue up the West Side loop two and turn left at the stop sign to follow the West Side main route.

[Music]