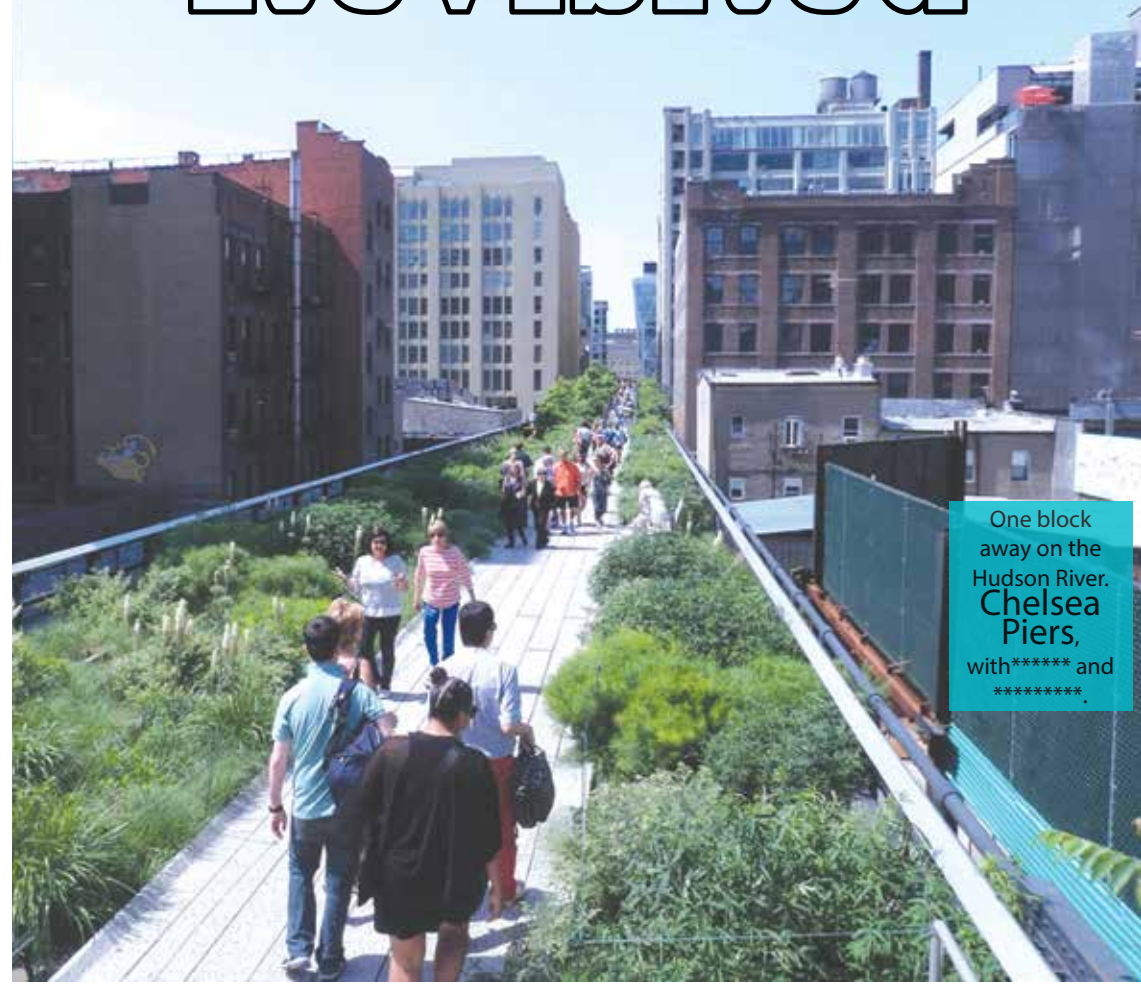


The High Line, Revisited



One block away on the Hudson River. Chelsea Piers, with***** and *****

We visited Manhattan's High Line—an abandoned elevated freight line in the Chelsea District on the Lower West Side between Hell's Kitchen and the West Village, that had been transformed into a mile-long elevated linear public park—in early June 2013. At that time, the park ran from Gansevoort Street (near Greenwich Village) to West 30th Street and the two original sections had only been open two years, and were relatively “undiscovered”. We'd heard that it had been extended north a half-mile to 34th Street, and this new section swung pretty much due west towards the Hudson and the West Side Highway: Tuesday was to be sunny and in the low 80's: a far far cry from overcast weeks and weeks in the 30's-50's: “Let's go!!!”

Freight trains originally ran along 10th Avenue in Manhattan's largest industrial district, and so many train/street-level traffic accidents occurred that 10th Avenue became known as Death Avenue. The High Line was built in the 1930's, part of a massive public-private project called the West Side Improvement, that lifted the dangerous trains 30 feet above the streets. The growth of interstate trucking in the 1950's led to a national decline in rail traffic, and the southernmost section of the High Line was demolished in the '60's. The last train on the High Line, in the '80's, pulled three carloads of frozen turkeys.

In the mid '80's, local property owners lobbied for the demolition of the entire structure. Pete Oblatz, a Chelsea resident, activist, and railroad enthusiast, challenged these efforts in court, hoping to re-establish rail service on the line (!). In 1999, Joshua David and Robert Hammond, two West Chelsea residents, formed Friends of the High Line, a non-profit group advocating the High Line's preservation as a public elevated park. “Designing the High Line” solicited proposals for the High Line's re-use, and 720 teams from 36 countries entered.

Construction of the park began in April 2006 and the first section, from Gansevoort Street to West 20th Street was opened June 9, 2009. The second section, from West 20th Street to West 30th Street opened June 8, 2011. There are 11 entrances—four have elevators—and it might be a good idea to point out there are only two public restrooms accessible from the High Line: at Gansevoort Street and Washington Avenue at the Diller-von Furstenberg Building, and at 16th Street, east of 10th Avenue. Don't dwell on this....

The High Line is owned and operated by the city of New York and is maintained by Friends of the High Line in partnership with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation. Private funding supports more the 90 percent of the park's annual operations.





So what's it like??? From Gansevoort Street to West 30th Street you're basically walking on a smooth, wide, level surface, often through lush green vegetation—flowers, ferns, and trees—about three stories above 10th Avenue, with astounding open-air views of the cityscape below, above, and all around, with occasional westward views of the Hudson and New Jersey. Heading south, at times you can see the Statue of Liberty in the distance. North of 30th you head toward the Hudson and Jersey. To keep interest up, the walkway changes every so often: viewing spurs, benches, seating steps, grasslands, woodlands, sun decks, and tunnel-like passages through buildings.

Tuesday, May 16, 2017: Getting There Wasn't Half the Fun: First decision: by train or by car??? Getting to the 34th Street entrance from Grand Central sounded like pretty much a snap, even for us up-country hillbillies: take the 7 Train subway to 34th Street, but rather than deal with the hassle (and the expense) of Metro North, we decided to drive. The Garmin took us to I-684, and on the way Cindy Roth warned us of "backups and delays from I-84 to Goldens Bridge". We bit the bullet, and bumpety bumped down 684, with no problems. On to the Saw Mill, smooth sailing until the "what the hell are they doing???" construction zone. Things deteriorated from here south, as both the volume, and the speed, of traffic noticeably increased.

Pop called the bridge across Spuyten Duyvil "the ten cent bridge": he'd be shocked that it's now "the six dollar bridge"!!! Ahhh, the West Side Highway: picture the Green Flag dropping at Daytona, for mega-zillions of civilian cars and trucks, jammed from roadside to roadside, everybody frustrated and crazed, weaving in and out. Then, the traffic lights, begin, on just about every short uptown/downtown block, and you creep creep creep along, and the whole thing becomes an ordeal. Finally, you're on 21st Street, and your car turns into a huge debit: it's going to cost you a small fortune to get rid of it for the 3-4-5 hours that you (and seven trillion other people) are happily touring on the High Line. In retrospect, the train woulda been a Better Idea.

So, frustrated, frazzled, and, mentally exhausted, we finally stepped out onto the High Line at the 23rd Street entrance. Gee Whiz, now we knew where a couple of zillion of those people in SUV's, cars, and buses were headed: I wondered if there was going to be room for us to squeeze in. Obviously, in the last 3-4 years, word's gotten out: the High Line is now a (Very) Popular Tourist Destination.

There was steady stream of walkers in both directions, walking, talking, and gawking. Curious about the new section, we headed north, The Good



News was it swung right over towards the Hudson. The Bad News was there's a huge building boom going on along both sides of the new section: gigantic office building and apartment building are being built as you walk, and the noise of the ongoing construction was loud and constant. Toss in the steady roar of the West Side Drive, and I found myself craving a quiet cove far up the Hudson, or a peaceful hike in the Highlands. We headed back south, and the southern end was a lot quieter but still jam-packed with touristos; hmmm, just like us.

All in all, if you haven't experienced the High Line, I'd say Go See It. Experience it. It's truly magic, walking through a forest of greenery and colorful gardens, three stories above a Manhattan avenue and between tall, tall buildings. And, it's truly visionary: all good things about the human race and this planet rolled up in about 20 Big City blocks. Just don't think the West Side Drive is going to be like a sleepy country lane in Columbia County. Hey, if you can boat down to the 79th Street Boat Basin, and take the subway.....

