

by Duncan J. D. Smith

Tram 43 cuts like a knife across the 17th District of Hernals, from the Gürtel out to the edge of the city. Although the journey holds little of real interest (except for the Art Nouveau Jörgerbad and the Kalvarienberg pilgrimage church) the terminus at Neuwaldegg conceals something very special.

Two towering obelisks

Just beyond the terminus is Waldegghofgasse, and halfway up a right turn drops down onto Schwarzenbergallee. This poker-straight avenue lined with mature trees is no ordinary suburban thoroughfare. At the lower end stands the magnificent Schloss Neuwaldegg and at the other are two towering obelisks, which form an entrance to an 80 hectare swathe of wild woodland known as Schwarzenbergpark. Since the late 1950s, when the area was opened up by the City of Vienna, walkers have come this way to enjoy the untamed woodland of what was once Europe's largest landscape garden.

Return to nature

Visiting Schwarzenbergpark today is an intriguing experience, not least because it's now indistinguishable from the surrounding Vienna Woods. It probably looked much the same back in 1765 when a wealthy soldier of fortune, Count Franz Moritz Lacy (1725-1801), purchased the land together with the *Schloss*. Adhering to the principles of the then-fashionable back-to-nature movement, Lacy cleared the woodland and imposed an entirely planned landscape. It was the first great landscape garden in Austria, inspired by the work of English gardening guru Lancelot "Capability" Brown.

STONES OF VIENNA

Unknown even to many Viennese, this magical untamed woodland was once the largest landscape garden in Europe

Land of the Wild Geese: Visiting Schwarzenberg Park

Made up of rolling hills and sweeping vistas, Lacy Park was punctuated by clumps of trees, ponds and streams, and all manner of architectural novelties. These included a Chinese pavilion, a miniature Garden of Eden, and a model village or Hameau, comprising seventeen thatched chalets (one of which is still standing), where Lacy's guests could experience the simple pleasures of country living.

Na Géanna Fiáne

Lacy was born in St. Petersburg, where his father, Count Peter von Lacy (1678-1751), was a successful military commander. The Count was no Russian though. English suppression and religious intolerance had forced him and others to flee their native Ireland, selling their military skills along the way to various ruling Catholic families. Together they were dubbed the Wild Geese (*Na Géanna Fiáne*).

Lacy Junior did likewise, settling in Austria where he became a highly paid field mar-



Count Lacy's Tomb in its sylvan setting in Schwarzenberg Park Photo: Duncan J.D. Smith

shal and statesmen for Empress Maria Theresa (1740-1780). He received her military order for services rendered during the Seven Years' War with Prussia (1756-63) and went on to become a close adviser to Emperor Joseph II (1765-90). A century later and another wild goose, Max O'Donnell (1812-1895), would save the young Emperor Franz Joseph I from an assassin's blade on the Mölkerbastei at Schottentor.

Count Lacy's Tomb

During Lacy's lifetime, he opened his park to the public, and it became popular with day-trippers. After his death it was acquired by the Schwarzenbergs, one of the Habsburg Empire's most powerful aristocratic families. Prince Karl von Schwarzenberg beat Napoleon at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, so it is little wonder the park still carries his rather than Lacy's surname today.

Over time, however, the park returned to its original natural state, and today only ghosts remain: an overgrown pond here, a pile of toppled stones there, and everywhere paths winding off into the leafy gloom. One of the few remaining structures is Lacy's own tomb, a miniature classical temple erected at the top of a track running up from Hohenstrasse. Surrounded by rusted railings and dense beech woods, it's a melancholy resting place. Looking out at the enveloping wilderness the scene inevitably evokes Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias": "Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!" ♦

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