Dundas Valley

Hamilton Conservation Authority

The Dundas Valley is one of southern Ontario's most spectacular natural treasures. Highlights of the 1,200-hectare conservation area include lush Carolinian forests, colourful meadows, cold-water streams, stunning geological formations and an array of rare plants, birds and wildlife.

The rich natural environment existing here and along the Niagara Escarpment has been designated a World Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

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Please pack out what you carry in.

Let others know you're there - sound your bell or call out before passing.

Keep to the right and allow other users to pass to your left.

Stay on the main trails. There are many rare and sensitive plants and small animals that are easily damaged or hurt if you leave the trails.

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Note: Because of rugged terrain, Dundas Valley trails have limited accessibility. Wheelchair and scooter users are encouraged to use the Rail Trail.

The Dundas Valley Trail system is provided on a user-fee basis and open to hikers, dog-walkers, joggers, cyclists, equestrians and cross-country skiers. Pay stations are conveniently located at major trail access points. Observing these general rules of etiquette will help ensure a great trail experience for everyone.

For more information on rentals and other facilities available, please call (905) 627-1233.

Order or visit www.conservationhamilton.ca for information on rentals and other facilities available.

Your HCA Nature’s Rewards Membership Pass lets you enjoy unlimited membership entry for one full year to the Hamilton Conservation Areas. You and your passengers gain easy entry to our conservation areas, plus unique privileges and a list of membership rewards, each valued at up to $36.

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The Main Loop Trail

Total Return Trip: 3.5 km

An Introductory Walk

For the first-time visitor to the Dundas Valley, this trail is an excellent place to begin. The Main Loop Trail is a journey through a mature deciduous forest, hemlock grove, stream valley, old apple orchard and open meadowland. Hikers, cyclists and equestrians alike will enjoy this diverse trail.

Getting Started

From the Trail Centre, take the Main Loop Trail south across the Rail Trail and down the slope into the woods. A right turn will begin your discovery of the Dundas Valley!

Points of Interest

1. Sulphur Springs

The first point of interest is the historical Sulphur Springs fountain. As you near Sulphur Springs Road you may notice a hint of sulphur in the air. The Sulphur Springs fountain is located on the opposite side of the road. During the late 1800s, the Sulphur Springs Hotel with its mineral spa was a popular summertime destination. The sulphur waters were believed to have wondrous curative powers that attracted visitors from far and wide. The hotel closed in 1990 after two severe fires. The existing house “Deenspring”, was built on the ruins and is now privately owned.

2. The Hermitage

Ruins are all that remain of the Hermitage, a once magnificent stone mansion that was built in 1855 by George Gordon Browne Laith. The stones used in construction were quarried from local sites; the red bricks from the Dundas Valley and the limestone sills from the Credit River Valley. Look closely at the stones of the ruins, and you may be able to find fossils of sea creatures and plant life. The last resident of the Hermitage was Mrs. Alma Dick Lauder, daughter of the Leiths. In 1934 the Hermitage was destroyed by fire. Mrs. Lauder built a small house within the ruins and continued to live there until her death in 1942.

3. Gatehouse Museum

The Gatehouse Museum was built around the same time as the Hermitage, was once known as “The Lodge”. It was originally the home of the gatekeeper and his family. The gatekeeper performed general duties and opened the gate for family and visitors to the Hermitage. Today, the building is the Gatehouse Museum, and houses the history of the Hermitage and the family who lived there. Behind the building, Ancaster Creek tumbles over the Hermitage Falls before winding its way through the valley. To make an appointment to visit the museum, or for a guided tour of the Hermitage ruins, please call 905-627-0333 or Feildesk Museum at 905-648-8984.

4. Apple Orchard

An excellent example of Ancaster’s early history is preserved in a simple 1.5-storey house just west of the Hermitage Ruins. The Griffin House was the home of Enerals Griffin, his wife Priscilla, their children and descendants. Born into slavery in Virginia, Enerals Griffin escaped to freedom in Canada in 1828-29. In 1834, the Griffins purchased the house with 50 acres of land and for the next 150 years their descendants farmed here. Group tours and themecaked teas are organized by the HCA and Feildesk Museum. The Griffin House is located just off Mineral Springs Road.

5. Thomas A. Beckett Living Forest

Each year, supporters of the Conservation Foundation Living Forest Fund are invited to help in the Thomas A. Beckett Forest. Many donors dedicate a tree to mark special achievements and to honor the lives of loved ones. Their donations have supported the maintenance of a trail and development of interpretive materials in the forest itself. The forest is named for Judge Thomas Beckett, a well-known conservationist and a founding member of HCA. Under its leadership, the HCA began a major lands acquisition program, which included lands in the Dundas Valley. The forest is located adjacent to the Governors Road parking area. To find out more about making a donation, please call 905-525-2181 ext. 112.

6. Hemlock Grove

As you make your way down the side of the valley towards the Hemlock Grove, you will notice a series of terraces, each one reminiscent of an old stream bed. Hemlocks, with their short, flat needles, offer year round protection for small birds and animals such as Red Squirrels, Nuthatches, Chickadees & occasionally owls. Watch closely for the unusual tree which has been nicknamed “Watcher of the Woods”. This tree, an American Beech with smooth, gray bark gets its nickname from the unusual markings on the trunk which resemble eyes.

7. Dundas Valley Trail Centre

The heart of the valley and the focal point of the trail system, the Dundas Valley Trail Centre is a beautiful reproduction of a Victorian train station. The Trail Centre offers interpretive displays, nature trails, and a picnic pavilion. It is open to the public on weekends and holidays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in the winter & 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. in the summer; and weekdays from 8:30 a.m. – 7:30 p.m. in both the winter & summer. Interpretive hikes, organized tours and school programs are available year round. For further information about these activities, please call 905-627-0333.

8. The Giant’s Rib Discovery Centre

Since 2006, the Giant’s Rib Discovery Centre (GRDC) has been headquartered at the Trail Centre, initiating programming by distributing materials related to the Dundas Valley and other parts of the Niagara Escarpment to Valley visitors. GRDC is a not-for-profit organization created to tell the story of the Niagara Escarpment, and promote uses that will ensure retention of its natural state for future generations. The Centre offers public educational lectures and tours to interpret the Niagara Escarpment through geographical, geological, historical, agricultural, and cultural experiences. Regular monthly lectures are offered by experts on natural and cultural topics related to the Niagara Escarpment, and artists and photographers are invited to display environmental works on weekends throughout the year. The GRDC also issues a monthly newsletter to more than 350 Friends of the Giant’s Rib, operates a web-site and produces educational materials based on the Niagara Escarpment, suitable for use in Ontario schools. A resource library exists at the Trail Centre and a vast array of research materials are offered on the GRDC web-site, www.giantsribs.ca.

9. The Griffin House

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