

Walk *the* Don

BURKE BROOK (Yonge Street to Bayview Avenue)

This walk follows a section of Burke Brook, a tributary of the West Don River, as it winds its way through a varied urban area. The walk begins where the stream is buried beneath a formal garden and ends as it flows naturally through a forested ravine. Along the way, specific plants will be described and identified.



Public Transit: Getting there: There is a subway stop at Lawrence Avenue and Yonge Street. Walk two blocks south on the east side of Yonge, past the traffic lights at St. Edmonds Drive, to begin at the arched entrance to Alexander Muir Memorial Gardens.

Getting home: Take bus route 11 south. This bus will take you to the Yonge-Davisville subway station.

*Public transit routes and schedules are subject to change. Please check with provider.
TTC Information: www.ttc.ca or 416-393-4636



Parking: There is no parking available at the start of this walk; however, there is some one-hour parking along the side streets in the area



Level of Difficulty/Accessibility: This walk follows a route with surfaces varying from gravel, limestone screenings, paved, bare dirt, woodchips and wooden stairs and boardwalks. This route passes through a leash-free zone (points 23-27) and is not stroller or wheelchair accessible.



Approximate Time: 1 to 2 hours.



Distance: 2.3 kilometres.



Caution: Be aware of cyclists and other trail users at all times. Use the trails at your own risk.



1 The walk begins at the arched entrance to **Alexander Muir Memorial Gardens**. Read the plaque on the left stone pillar.

2 Enter the gardens and walk towards a low wall and bench over which you can see tennis courts. Take the left or right stairs down and follow the crushed-brick path to the right.

3 Walk to the right of the tennis courts and lawn bowling greens into Lawrence Park Ravine.

4 The ravine slopes seen both to your right and left are evidence of a **buried stream**. Burke Brook originates in Downsview, but is mainly underground until it reaches the Avenue Road and Lawrence Avenue area where it flows above ground through **Chatsworth ravine**. Before reaching Yonge Street and Alexander Muir Gardens, Burke Brook disappears underground and cannot be seen here. Many

of Toronto's streams have been intentionally channelled underground to make way for roads and buildings. Burke Brook, a tributary of the Don River, joins the West Don near **Sunnybrook Hospital**. The West Don eventually joins the East Don to form the Lower Don River.

5 At the end of the bowling greens, note the metal railing/grate to your right. Burke Brook emerges from underground here but is severely restricted within a narrow, straight, cement channel. Stormwater from the area's hard surfaces runs off directly down the ravine slopes or into storm sewers that empty into Burke Brook. Stones along the bank above the cement reduce erosion but, in some places, flooding has moved the stones and soil has eroded anyway.

6 As you approach the end of the parking lot, follow the trail on the left side of Burke Brook. Use the woodchip trail instead of the

trail of compacted soil. The stream bank is covered with non-native species. Many of these plants are considered invasive because they outcompete native wildflowers and shrubs that gradually disappear.

7 Stay off the slopes between the main trail and the houses to your left. Trampling the slopes harms understorey plants and also increases soil compaction and erosion.

8 The largest trees along the stream banks are crack willows, a non-native species. As the soil at their bases erodes, they tend to topple over in high winds. Note the cut pieces of a large willow on the ground to your left. On your right, note that one part of another large willow still stands but half has fallen.

9 Just past the willows, Burke Brooke goes underground again at a metal railing. Continue on the woodchip trail until you pass under the bridge over the ravine at Mount Pleasant Road.

10 On the left, after you pass under the bridge, there are two interesting trees that are members of the larch/tamarack family. They have many short needles in each bundle. These trees lose all their needles every fall, but their tiny cones remain.

11 Follow the paved path to your right into **Blythwood Ravine Park** and find a metal railing where Burke Brook once again emerges, now contained in a cement channel with larger, sloped walls. Walk with the stream on your right.

12 On your right, find a tree that seems to have many (10 – 12) trunks. Look carefully at the leaves and you will see that two different kinds of trees are intertwined. One is a Manitoba maple and the other is a crack willow. If you can't see any leaves, note the two different bark patterns. In addition, several species of shrubs are intertwined at the base of these tree trunks. Where there is an opening along the stream bank, look across the stream. Among the trees, you may be able to see damage to the ravine slopes done by excess trampling and **structures built illegally** for mountain bike stunts.

13 To the left of the path, note the cluster of trees with a strange branching pattern. These trees are staghorn sumacs. Part of their name refers to the velvet covering on the young twigs (like the velvet on a stag's new antlers). In spring and summer, the leaves are bright green but turn vivid red in fall. Near the end of these sumacs are a few trees with white bark. They are white birch. These two native species require lots of sun and grow along forest edges, roadsides and other open places.

14 As you walk further, look upward to your right and observe several majestic evergreen trees. They are white pines, a native species that has been adopted by Ontario as its tree emblem.

15 Continue walking and find where Burke Brook again goes underground through a metal grate just before the trail goes up a little and is paved. On your right, note two

commemorative trees. These ginkgo trees are not native to Canada. During summer and fall, note the fan-shaped leaves with veins like the ribs of a fan.

16 Cross Blythwood Road to enter **Sherwood Park** (16.2 hectares). Take the stairs down into the park. At the bottom, take the path curving to your immediate right. (The park path straight ahead from the stairs passes a playground, splashpad and washrooms, open seasonally.) Look to your left through the shrubs and you'll see another metal railing where Burke Brook once more emerges from underground.

17 On your right, note a large evergreen leaning over the path with a smaller one near it. These trees are eastern hemlocks. Each needle is attached separately to the branches and has two white stripes on the bottom side. Right beside the larger hemlock is a yellow birch, not to be confused with white birch.

18 The elaborate, elevated stairway was created to prevent trampling of the fragile ravine slope. A variety of native trees and shrubs have been planted where invasive trees have been removed. Major trunks and branches of the removed trees have been left all along the slope to help stabilize the soil. Also note the large pieces of armour stone placed at various locations along the stream to prevent erosion of the sandy stream banks.

19 When you are opposite the playground slides, look at the bank across the stream. Note how

people and dogs have created many eroded pathways to the water's edge.

20 When you are opposite the splashpad, note that a section of stream bank has gabion baskets, stones encased in wire, to help stabilize stream banks.

21 When you reach the red brick building, cross the bridge to your left. (Following the paved road up a hill to the right will take you to the eastern end of Sherwood Avenue.)

22 When you cross the bridge, stand at the bottom of the stairs and note the natural wood barriers attached to metal railings and simple wood rails. Volunteers built these barriers to keep people and dogs off the slopes adjacent to these stairs.

23 Follow the path to the right at the bottom of the stairs. Where the path splits, look along the right path to see a cement wall and a major metal grate where Burke Brook not only goes underground, but also goes out of the park and under **Mount Hope Cemetery**. Note the map of forest trails. We will follow the lowest trail marked. Whenever there's a choice, take the path to your right. Go through the wooden gate into the forest. The paths within the forest are officially a leash-free area for dogs. The fences limit the number of dogs running freely within the actual forest. Note the accumulation of leaf litter within the fenced areas.

24 As you walk, look up frequently and see grand examples of

white pines and eastern hemlocks. Some of these trees are more than 185 years old. There are also sugar maples and both red and white oaks. This small forest represents the typical climax community in this region. Dead trees are left standing as snags. They provide habitat for a variety of insects, birds and mammals. Look for areas where woodpeckers have chipped off sections of bark to find food.

25 When you look ahead and see where the forest seems to block the trail, look at the trees to your left. The smooth, grey bark of the American beech trees attracts people who want to carve initials in it. Don't do it! Any cuts in a tree's bark admit harmful insects, fungi and bacteria.

26 Continue down some stairs and onto a boardwalk. On your right, behind trees and bushes, Burke Brook again comes aboveground and is once again within the park but not yet visible because of vegetation. Listen carefully and you may hear it.

27 About half way along this boardwalk, note a very large, groundwater discharge or **wet seepage area** on your right. Plants growing here are not able to grow elsewhere. Skunk cabbage has peculiar, thick, fleshy flowers very early in the spring. During late spring, summer and fall, this plant has large, very bright green leaves. As you continue, go down a series of elevated stairs. You will see other seepage areas on your left and on your right. Note how Burke Brook tumbles over its rocky bed and becomes well aerated.

28 Later, passing through a wooden gate, note the huge wall created by giant gabion baskets. An early property owner altered the ravine slope and built this wall, extending his elevated structures actually onto park property. Once built, this wall has been allowed to remain. Ravine alterations, including change of grade and removal of trees, are now strictly regulated by Toronto's Ravine and Natural Feature Protection By-law. Encroachments onto park property are also more closely monitored and corrected.

29 At the end of this gabion wall, follow the main path to your right, walking over a major culvert containing Burke Brook.

30 Follow the gravel roadway up to Bayview Avenue. You will lose sight of the stream as you climb the hill. (Burke Brook goes under Bayview through another large culvert and emerges in the ravine on the east side of Bayview.) As you walk up this gravel road, look to your left and find a cluster of white birch trees. Between you and the white birches, note the thick, woody wild grape vine climbing a tree. Wild grape is a native plant that stabilizes soil and provides habitat and food for a variety of wildlife. On occasion, wild grape climbs tree trunks, invades the entire crown, becomes an outer covering of the tree canopy and ultimately weakens and kills the trees it has climbed.

31 To the right of where you exit the ravine, there is a TTC bus stop at the base of the overhead walkway over Bayview Avenue.

Trail Users' Guide

- Be advised that you are responsible for your own safety and wellbeing.
- Be aware of cyclists and other trail users at all times.
- Walk with others.
- Keep your children in sight at all times.
- Trails may involve stairs and slopes.
- Trails may not be lit or cleared of ice and snow.
- Stay on the trails or mown areas; do not leave them at any time.
- Cross roads only at intersections, lights or crosswalks.
- Keep your pet on a leash and clean-up after it.
- Do not pick, damage, or plant any vegetation.
- Beware of poison ivy: "Leaflets of three let it be."
- Respect and do not feed wildlife.
- Do not light fires.
- Leave nothing behind.
- Remember that washrooms operate seasonally.
- Avoid the trails during and after a storm; water levels can rise suddenly.
- Wear footwear for pavement, loose or broken surfaces and bare earth.
- Wear clothing to suit the weather and protect against insects.
- Carry drinking water.

Learn more about the Don River watershed at www.trca.ca



Prepared by the Don Watershed Regeneration Council & Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

BURKE BROOK WALK

