

Walk *the* Don

EAST DON PARKLAND (Leslie St. & Steeles Ave. to Leslie St. & Sheppard Ave.) Discover the natural heritage of this popular trail through the East Don Parkland. Follow German Mills Creek and the East Don River as they meander through lush forested ravine, wildflower meadows and wetlands teeming with life. The natural channel, series of wetlands and abundance of native species make this section of the East Don River well worth the exploration.



Public Transit: Getting there: From Finch Station on the Yonge Subway line, take bus 53A Steeles East to Steeles and Leslie. Walk 200m south on the west side of Leslie to find the entrance to the East Don Parkland. Alternatively, the 51 Leslie bus stops at Leslie and Francine Drive (both north and southbound), a 200m walk north to the park entrance.

Getting home: The walk ends 100m from the Leslie Subway Station on the Sheppard line. There is a subway entrance at the southwest corner of Leslie and Sheppard or as you leave the parkland from the trail, take the overpass over Sheppard and there is a subway entrance on the southwest side past the overpass.

*Public transit routes and schedules are subject to change. Please check with provider. TTC Information: www.ttc.ca or 416-393-4636. YRT Information: www.yrt.ca or 1-866-668-3978.



Parking: There is parking located on Equestrian Court south of Steeles on Leslie. Walk time should be doubled if driving, as this walk is not a loop. There is also a parking lot at the end of the walk. From Leslie and Sheppard look for the sign for the East Don Parkland on your right and take your first right at the unnamed street before the underpass and then turn right again into the parking lot.



Level of Difficulty/Accessibility: Easy to Moderate. The paved pathway is stroller and wheelchair accessible.



Approximate Time: Two to three hours depending on whether you stop to look at all the features.



Distance: 4.8 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 entrance to the East Don Parkland, south of Steeles on the west side of Leslie. To begin, you will be following **German Mills Creek**. As you enter the park, stop to read the interpretive sign and enjoy the surrounding cedar/willow forest. As you continue, to the right of the path you will notice that many of the Cedars have exposed roots. The high water table in the area has eroded the soil around the roots. Many of the trees have blown down because these shallow, exposed roots don't provide the trees enough support in heavy winds.

2

A little further ahead, to your left, you will notice plastic tree guards remaining at the base of some of the smaller trees. These guards protect the trees from hungry rodents and lagomorphs (rabbits and hares), particularly during the scarce winter months. The local community has been involved in planting trees and shrubs here to improve the quality of the ravine through coordinated events held by the **East Don Parkland Partners**, City of

Toronto and TRCA.

3

Walk under the GO and pedestrian bridges and look to your right. This area is a beaver clear-cut. The ability of the beaver to manipulate their environment is second only to man. Their engineering prowess tends to get them in trouble because their activities often result in the creation of **wetlands** and open water, and may even result in the flooding of urban areas. You will notice that many of the trees in the area are enclosed in wire cages. The cages prevent the trees from being damaged by beavers.

4

Next, you will approach the confluence of the creek from **Bestview Forest** and **German Mills Creek**. From July to September you will notice the vibrant purple flowers of purple loosestrife, a beautiful but vigorously invasive species that has established a stronghold at this site. There is also a small thicket of Hawthorns. Hawthorns are a large family of small trees with very sharp thorns and white or pink flowers in

flat-topped clusters. They provide protected habitat and are an important food source for birds and small mammals.

5 Next the creek meanders past a roundabout and to your right there is a small stand of young white pines. The community planted these about 10 years ago and they are thriving on the fertile floodplain soils.

6 On the right just before the fork leading to Bestview Forest, you can see stone/stump reinforcement along the riverbank. Reinforcement is needed to stop erosion that could damage the sewer system, threaten landscapes in the ravine or nearby properties, and pollute **Lake Ontario**. This reinforcement was installed about 10 years ago in an effort to stabilize the stream bank but has eroded and will soon need to be replaced. The exposed roots and areas where the slope has slumped into the creek are warning signs of erosion.

7 Here the trail reaches a fork near the confluence of **German Mills Creek** and the **East Don River**. The right fork leads you across **German Mills Creek**. The walk will continue along the left fork but to the right there is a good view of the forks from the bridge and an interpretive sign about the History of German Mills a little further along. Follow this trail to see the Cummer Mill Dam (path on left) and up the hill to Bestview Forest, a pristine remnant mixed-hardwood stand.

8 When you reach a second fork in the path continue right to the wooden bridge. The bridge across the **East Don River** is a great vantage point to watch the salmon running

in September/October. To your left before the bridge you will see the cream coloured box that hosts a water quality monitoring station (north bank of river). The green pipes at the river's edge feed water to a station to get water quality information. This area was once known as Scripture Town as in the late 1800s and early 1900s they used to hold bible camps in the summer here.

9 As you reach the **Cummer Street Bridge** you will notice a native black cherry tree and an interpretive sign to your right. Next to the sign you will notice a bed of rocks covered in chicken wire. This is an erosion control method called rip rap used to stabilize the bank and help prevent the trail from washing out.

Note: If you wish to exit or begin the walk at Cummer you can catch the 42 Cummer bus to/from Finch Station.

10 Continue under the bridge and in a few hundred meters you will notice a wetland on your right hand side. This wetland was created in 2008 to restore important wetland habitat and reduce flooding in the **East Don Parkland**. After only a few years, the wetland is now full of life with frogs (toad, leopard and green), birds, deer and other wildlife that have moved into the wetland.

In 2010, more than 500 students from local schools planted aquatic plants in the wetland through Toronto and Region conservation Aquatic Plants Program (APP). APP brings the classroom outdoors and provides hands-on nature education to students.

Just behind the wetland is a walking trail the follows the old Cummer Ave

before it was relocated outside of the floodplain.

11 As you walk past the wetland and enter the hydro corridor the landscape changes dramatically. This area of hydro corridor provides a large expanse of open meadow habitat to the area. Adjacent to the **East Don River** is the 'milkweed meadow' that is rich in milkweed and wildflowers in the spring and summer. Provided this area escapes mowing in the late summer/early fall (as it has for the last 10 years) it is excellent habitat where Monarch butterflies, a designated Species of Special Concern by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, can reproduce and fuel up for a long migration to Mexico.

12 Continuing to the bridge you can see an **old river oxbow**, downstream on the right. Ten years ago there was a meander on the south bank of the river, but the oxbow broke and the area collected sediment over time. The meander is now completely cut off from the river, but the old riverbed supports a seasonal pool of water.

Evidence of an historic mill site and weathered beams, was unearthed during a 2000 storm. These beams have since washed away during subsequent storm events, leaving no trace of the area's settlement history except in the memories of the area's residents and stewards.

13 At the end of the bridge you will notice a channel reinforced on both banks by rectangular containers of wire filled with stone. These are gabion baskets used to stabilize the stream to prevent erosion and flooding.

14 Past the channel, this open area was the site of the first community planting in the parkland. This site is the former parking lot of the North York Township works yard. During the community planting, the volunteers discovered that the soil was compacted and remnants of construction material remained. The tree cover is slowly re-establishing in the area, despite the disturbance, and in the meadow to your left you might just spot a white-tailed deer.

15 As you continue along the path you will notice a second restored wetland to your right across the river. This wetland is easier to see in the early spring or fall when there is less vegetation along the trail. The two wetlands north of Finch provide a significant amount of critical wetland habitat, help control floods and act as natural filters to improve water quality in the river.

16 Take the right fork to continue under the Finch Ave Bridge and continue your walk. After the bridge take the right fork again at the interpretive sign and memorial trees. At either of these junctions, the forks to the left lead to Finch Ave where you can catch the 39 Finch bus to Finch Station.

Here the path comes quite close to the river. This vantage point reveals the early stages of erosion along the stream channel. The bank adjacent to the path is slowly beginning to slump into the river. The pool/riffle sequences here help to slow the river down to prevent erosion and are a great vantage point to spot wildlife like waterfowl and salmon.

17 As you continue, you will notice a small stand of lush, healthy fir trees to the left of the path.

18 Uphill, past the firs is an area that has undergone significant work to prevent erosion. To your left is a wall of gabion baskets and to your right is fencing to keep people on the path. If you look below, the stream channel is also stabilized by a series of gabion baskets. Without this work the area would be at a high risk for erosion damage.

19 Past the rip rap and down the hill you will reach an open field with regenerating cedar trees. This is a great place for bird watching and wildlife spotting. Keep your eyes and ears open!

20 Past the field on your left hand side there is a large many-stemmed crack willow. Crack willow are non-native trees that tend to be brittle and shallow rooted.

21 Notice another large wetland area to your right. Here a concrete storm grate moves stormwater from the sewer system to a meandering natural channel to the wetland. The wetland helps to filter the water on its journey down the **East Don River** to **Lake Ontario**.

22 Across the path from the tennis courts (near the lifesaving equipment), is another old mill site with the beams still visible. The beams are easiest to spot in early spring or late fall when there is less vegetation. This is one of seven known historical mill sites on the **East Don River** between Steeles and Sheppard.

23 To your left past the tennis courts is a wetland filled with cattails. Further down the path the wetland opens up and there is open water. This wetland is an example of the marvel of beaver engineering. The open water is full of standing dead trees killed due to prolonged flooding. These dead trees are important ecosystem features because they provide beneficial habitat for birds, insects and cavity nesters.

24 When you reach the **riparian zones** interpretive sign you will notice another river oxbow to the right. Natural river channels are dynamic. Erosion, flooding and the force of the water cause the **East Don River** to slowly change its course over time. In fact, the river will soon break through the meander at this oxbow and cut the existing channel off from the river. A tiny oxbow lake will form (like the one further upstream), but this will fill in with time leaving little trace of the river's former path.

25 When you come to the next fork in the path continue straight (slight left). Here a steel bridge crosses the **East Don River** on your right with **Newtonbrook Creek** at its far end. While this route is not part of the walk, a worthwhile trip up this heavily forested valley with black cherry, beech, skeletal beech and basswood trees takes you back to Finch Avenue East near Bayview Avenue. Notice the human encroachment along this path and let it serve as a reminder to please stay on the trails.

A little past the fork, is a bench that provides a great viewing point for watching the goings on in the wetland. The wetland is a busy home to a rich

abundance of wildlife in all seasons.

26 At the next river oxbow, on the left-hand side of the trail, lies a diverse patch of forest. Notice stems of hemlock, maple, skeletal beech, cedar and cherry. The bench provides a great spot to relax and take in the scenery near the end of your walk.

27 Continue across the wooden bridge and past the stairs leading to Clarinda Dr (to the right). Then, cross under the railway bridge and head right over the second wooden bridge. These bridges are great for spotting salmon during spawning season.

28 To your right past the 2nd bridge is a cattail marsh right on the edge of the path. As marshes mature the open

water fills with cattails and then with grasses and shrubs. **Cattails** are an important food source for muskrats and a great place to spot Red-Winged Blackbirds, American Coots, and Rails on morning walks.

29 At the interpretive sign, take the right path over the wooden bridge. Downstream from the bridge you will notice what remains of a small concrete dam. A small side channel provides passage for spawning salmon to move upstream.

30 Veer left at the parking lot to reach Sheppard Ave. Here you can take the overpass to reach the subway or continue kitty corner across Sheppard at Leslie to continue your walk on the **Betty Sutherland Trail**.

Trail Users' Guide

- Users of these trail guides are responsible for their own safety and well being.
- 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.
- 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 other walks and the Don River watershed
at www.trca.ca



EAST DON PARKLAND AUDIO WALK

