

# Walk *the* Don

**LOWER BARTLEY SMITH GREENWAY** (Langstaff Road to Steeles Avenue West) This walk follows the Upper West Don River in the City of Vaughan southwards from Langstaff Park on Langstaff Road (east of Keele Street) to Steeles Avenue West (west of Dufferin Street). The route follows the southern portion of the Bartley Smith Greenway (BSG), an as-yet incomplete trail system through the centre of Vaughan from Teston Road down to Steeles Avenue West. Note that the start of this walk is at a fenced seasonal sports field (Langstaff Park) that may be formally closed during the winter months.



**Public Transit: Getting there:** From Downsview subway station, take TTC bus routes 107 B/C/D/F (Keele North). For 107 C/D/F, disembark on Keele Street at Langstaff Road and walk east along Langstaff Road (sidewalk on north side) for 400 metres to Planchet Road. Cross at the traffic lights and walk 100 metres along the soft shoulder to Langstaff Park parking lot. For 107 B (which goes west along Langstaff Road to Keele Street), disembark at Planchet Road. Alternatively, use YRT bus 22A (York University - Newmarket via King City and Oak Ridges), disembark on Keele Street at Langstaff Road, and proceed as above.

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



**Parking:** Ample parking is available at Langstaff Park. Please note that the parking lot may be closed during the winter months.



**Level of Difficulty/Accessibility:** Much of the trail is hard-surfaced with only minor gradients, however there are a few short steep grades and some soft gravel patches. Stroller and wheelchair accessible.



**Approximate Time:** 1.5 to 2 hours.



**Distance:** 6.5 kilometres.



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



Two main environments are experienced in this walk. From Langstaff Road to Highway 7, the trail encompasses Langstaff EcoPark, a regenerating natural area along the West Don river valley flanked on either side by industrial development. Here the trail surface is generally packed crushed limestone, with some soft gravel patches and stretches of asphalt. South of Glen Shields Avenue, the route passes through Marita Payne Park, one of Vaughan's most beautiful city parks set in an established residential area. This section is hardpaved throughout. Except for a short stretch near the southern end and one other street crossing, this walk is completely off-road.

1

The starting point is at the Langstaff Park sports field parking lot on the south side of Langstaff Road west of the CN railway tracks and east of Keele Street. There is a seasonal portable toilet at this location. If access is closed, the walk can be started at point number four, immediately east of the railway tracks.

2

Just west of the parking lot, in a separate tree-covered park, is a **pioneer cemetery** dating from the founding of the German Episcopal St. Stephen's Church in 1833. The memorial from 1965 incorporates a number of the original tombstones. The park is fenced off and entrance is available only from Langstaff Road. [There is a soft shoulder but no sidewalk along Langstaff Road.] Return to the parking lot to access the BSG trail via the short spur at the south-west corner. To your right is a large stand of Phragmites, which looks spectacular in late summer with its purple seed heads. However, this is regarded as an invasive wetland species. At the T-junction, the right fork extends westwards for 250 metres, ending at a gate at Langstaff Road. Currently there is no public trail immediately north of here.

3

Turn left to continue into **Langstaff EcoPark**. This park was officially opened in June 1997 and is the most significant natural regeneration area in the Upper West

Don subwatershed, despite being surrounded by the Langstaff industrial-commercial district. The EcoPark is the result of a visionary partnership between Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA), the City of Vaughan, members of the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce, notably Quebecor World, and the Vaughan Rotary Club. Over 10,000 trees, shrubs and aquatic plants have been planted and over 100 bird boxes installed in the river valley since 1992. These initiatives have dramatically enhanced rolling upland and lowland meadow habitats, and created new wetlands to help stabilize the watercourse and improve water quality downstream. Depending on the season and time of day, it is possible to catch sight of coyotes, foxes, beavers, mink, snakes, turtles, frogs and many species of birds. During late spring through fall the meadows are also alive with butterflies, bees, dragonflies and other insects, and full of colour from wildflowers and flowering shrubs. The course of the West Don River is dominated by large, mature trees, particularly Black Willows, Black Walnuts and Sugar Maples which help block out the view of the industrial buildings on the surrounding table lands. The four-storey birdhouse situated at 100 metres from the trail junction is intended for Purple Martins, which nest in colonies.

The trail soon arcs back towards Langstaff Road. Cross the CN tracks with care and immediately turn right. This line is also used by the Go Transit service to Barrie, which was reinstated in 2008.

**4** Adjacent to the railway crossing is a [memorial plaque](#) to Attilio de Gasperis, patriarch of a well-known Vaughan land development family, who used to farm in this area and whose valley lands are now part of Langstaff EcoPark. The trail descends southwards into the valley, crosses the river and enters a broad floodplain where the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce held an annual tree planting event for several years. These trees are now two to four metres in height. Natural infiltration of willow trees is now also very evident. In the spring, the many nesting boxes installed in this area are mostly occupied by tree swallows. From here, the trail climbs briefly into the upland meadow adjacent to the CN line, bringing some of the surrounding industrial landscape into the line of sight, before descending through a Staghorn Sumac patch to cross the West Don River again. Several interpretive signs have been installed in this stretch.

**5** About 150 metres beyond the bridge, the trail passes between two [stormwater retention ponds](#) (Audia Ponds North & South). These can hold millions of litres of water and provide treatment for stormwater runoff from over 90 hectares of adjacent industrial land to the north. These ponds have become fully naturalized, and now contain extensive beds of cattails and Phragmites, both of which are vigorous invaders. The wetlands provide additional water filtration as well as habitat for waterfowl and other wetland bird species such as Red-winged Blackbirds. A weir on the far side of the larger pond to the right connects

with the river. Along this section of the trail from late summer to early fall you will see colourful stands of 1.5-metre high golden Woodland Sunflowers and brilliant mauve Ironweeds and of course ubiquitous goldenrods. All these flowers produce nectar to attract butterflies, so there's a good chance of seeing Sulphur and Monarch butterflies, or even Giant Swallowtails, the largest butterfly found in Canada.

**6** Turn right at the fork in the trail 150 metres beyond the water retention ponds; the left fork leads out of the park to Audia Court (another convenient parking location). You are now entering [Keffer Marsh](#), an engineered wetland complex that is the highlight of Langstaff EcoPark. This two-hectare project, named for an early settler who farmed this part of Vaughan Township in the early 1800s, comprises the marsh itself and a larger deciduous swamp, believed to be the largest constructed area of its kind in Ontario. Water is supplied from the east through Westminster Creek, a tributary of the West Don River that was diverted from its original southwards course in the 1970s to accommodate local development. Westminster Creek used to flow into the main branch of the West Don River south of Steeles Avenue in G. Ross Lord Park. The residual stream, locally called Fisherville Creek, still exists south of Highway 407, and largely serves to drain stormwater ponds collecting runoff from the highway and surrounding area.

Base flow at Keffer Marsh is directed into a settling pond, through cattail

thickets and into the marsh, then through a porous rock weir into the West Don River. This design serves to maximize water quality improvements and diversify wetland habitat. The much greater volumes of water generated during major rain storms are diverted into the deciduous swamp, designed to hold 10 million litres of water over a 24-hour period. Here the sediments settle out and cleaner water seeps back into the watercourse. The swamp is expected to fill with water about four times a year.

**7** The various features of the Keffer Marsh complex can be observed from three bridges on the trail and an observation platform immediately south of the marsh. A beautiful High Bush Cranberry specimen, with bright red berries in fall and winter, is located on the bank just to the right of the second bridge. A number of interpretive signs have been installed along this section. At the junction beyond the third bridge, take the left-hand fork to look at the [water control structure](#). From this point, retrace your steps, then stop at the observation deck for a view over the marsh. Proceed up the incline and cross Rivermede Road with caution. The river flows under the road through a box culvert.

**8** South of Rivermede Road, the valley narrows and for 200 metres the trail passes through riparian shrubs and trees such as Black Walnut and Black Willow before climbing into an upland meadow adjacent to North Rivermede Road. The trail then unexpectedly enters a dense mature

**upland mixed forest** remnant of mostly maple, walnut trees and pine trees, where for about 100 metres meadow flowers give way to woodland flowers including the invasive Garlic Mustard. The sudden change in air temperature on entering this forest patch on a hot sunny day is striking.

Beyond the forest, you can bear left at the fork to leave the trail for a refreshment break at the small plaza at Highway 7 and North Rivermede Road.

**9** Continue by taking the trail that descends southwards into the river valley, noting the large stands of Staghorn Sumac on the left. The route soon passes under **Highway 7** alongside the river. Directly after the underpass, the embankments seen on either side of the river mark the position of a previous bridge over the West Don along the old alignment of Centre Street before Highway 407 was constructed. At the top of the embankment to the left, a 50-metre section of the old roadway is now used for gravel storage, with access to Centre Street. The trail curves to the right as it continues between the river and Highway 407. Just beyond the 407 underpass, bear right at the trail fork. The left trail is private and leads along the hydro corridor for 800 metres to Centre Street. The main trail at this point passes through a broad lowland meadow, but the valley narrows as it enters the Glen Shields residential area.

**10** After passing under Glen Shields Avenue, the trail enters **Marita Payne Park**, named for the Canadian sprinter who won two silver medals

in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. The floodplain of the West Don now occupied by the park was reserved as open space following the devastation of Hurricane Hazel in 1954, while the surrounding lands were still mostly rural. The park was constructed in its present form when the area was developed for residential purposes in the early 1980s. It offers typical city park amenities and features, such as grassy areas, sports fields and children's playgrounds. However the park is well-endowed with mature shade trees, including Black Willow, Weeping Willow, poplar, Black Walnut and maple, and wildlife remains abundant. One local resident, whose garden backs onto the park, has observed over 140 species of birds in Marita Payne Park, as well as deer, beaver, otter, mink, fox and even opossum. You will encounter five side trails as you go through the park, leading to local residential streets. The main path curves to the left round Marita Payne Pond, and later skirts to the left of a baseball diamond. The pond is a haven for ducks and geese throughout the year; it is actually a stormwater retention pond, last dredged to remove silt in the fall of 2011. A portable toilet is accessible in the park area, however it is only available seasonally.

**11** Close to Dufferin Street, the main trail does an abrupt right turn and crosses the bridge over the river to exit the park at **Glen Shields Avenue**. The culvert under the road leads to further trails through Glen Shields Park to the west. To reach the

Dufferin Street and Steeles Avenue West intersection with restaurants, public transit and other amenities, turn left on Glen Shields Avenue, right on Dufferin Street and walk south for 600 metres.

**12** However, the trail continues on the east side of Dufferin Street. Cross at the Glen Shields Avenue lights and pick up the trail entrance just south of the CN railway bridge. Although it is close to major streets, this is a quiet, heavily forested and little used stretch of the Greenway. However, this section can be hazardous during wet weather; much of the trail, which crosses the river twice, is in the valley floor and subject to flooding. The meadow area

close to Steeles Avenue was planted in the 1990s and is becoming a healthy-looking successional forest of oak, ash and maple trees. Signs facing Steeles Avenue West announce West Don Valley Open Space and the Bartley Smith Greenway. Turn right (west) towards Dufferin Street (200 metres).

**13** This walk ends at the site of Fisherville Cemetery, located up a short embankment 60 metres from the trail end on Steeles Avenue, which served Fisherville Presbyterian Church from 1832. The community of Fisherville, named for Jacob Fisher, the first settler in this area in 1797, grew up around the Dufferin/Steeles intersection.

### 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 the Don River watershed at [www.trca.ca](http://www.trca.ca)



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



# BARTLEY SMITH GREENWAY WALK

