

Walk *the* Don

MILNE HOLLOW (Lawrence Avenue E., Don Valley Pkwy.)

Once an active industrial site in the 19th century, Milne Hollow demonstrates how a natural greenspace, two railways and an expressway can coexist in an urban environment, yet give the feeling of being in the wilderness.



Public Transit: Getting there: The TTC 54 Lawrence East bus operates from the Eglinton subway station. Get off at Railside Road and walk 10 minutes down toward the Don Valley Parkway on the south side of Lawrence Avenue East to enter Milne Hollow at Old Lawrence Avenue.

Getting home: Catch the TTC 54 Lawrence East bus to return to the Eglinton subway station.

*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: Two lots - The Sauriol lot is south off Lawrence Ave E at the Sauriol sign. The Moccassin Trail Park lot is accessed off Don Mills Road, turn east on Donway East, and south on Moccasin Trail.



Level of Difficulty/Accessibility: All pathways are hard-surfaced with the exception of the mown grass part in Moccasin Trail Park; however these points (points 13 and 14) may be viewed from the paved path for stroller and wheelchair accessibility.



Approximate Time: 1 to 2 hours.



Distance: 3.7 kilometres.



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



1 Welcome to **Milne Hollow**, a six-hectare park on the East Don River. In 1850, this area was a thriving community of 16 buildings including houses, barns, a woolen mill, a sawmill, a dry goods store, housing for workers and several sheds.

In 1827, Alexander Milne built a three-storey mill on Wilket Creek in Edwards Gardens, but because of a low water supply, relocated to this spot five years later. His second mill, near the parking lot, was a long rambling one-storey building powered by a 15-foot overshot wheel. By 1861, Milneford (Milford) Mills produced over 2000 metres of cloth per year and almost 122,000 metres of lumber. A devastating flood in 1878 swept away the mill-dam, logs in the pond, both mills and the bridge. Today, two cement abutments from the rebuilt bridge stand behind the pond as monuments to the past.

2 Known as **Milne House**, this gothic revival-style farmhouse, built around 1865 for William Milne,

is one of the oldest frame houses in Toronto. The house faces Old Lawrence Avenue as it detoured down the east wall of the valley, wound through the settlement, crossed the river and rose up the west wall to rejoin the straight concession road. Miraculously, this house survived the 1878 flood and was used until the 1960s.

3 The two steel towers on the hillside are T-bar supports from the former **Don Valley Ski Club**. This slope was cleared for the 1934 Ontario Championship Ski Meet that attracted 10,000 spectators. Straw bales protected skiers from crashing into cars in the parking lot. By the early 1970s, this area was abandoned once again.

4 We are in the **Don Watershed**, a 360 square kilometre part of the GTA draining into the Don River and its many tributaries. This watershed extends 38 km from its source in the Oak Ridges Moraine to its mouth at the Keating Channel where it empties into Lake Ontario. In 1950, only 15% of the

watershed was urban, whereas now, it is over 80% that is urban.

During heavy storms, overflow water from the East Don flows into Milne Stormwater Pond where it is held, naturally filtered and slowly released back into the river. Flood control focuses on delaying the flow of floodwater to prevent flooding and that's one of the roles of these ponds.

These **Toronto Bird Flyway** markers tell that this valley has been designated as one of three Toronto flyway corridors planted specifically to feed both resident and migrating birds. Two hundred kinds of birds pass through the Don Watershed each year, and 83 stay to breed. Birds migrate along green corridors.

5 Look out over the river. It was not always here. Back **20,000 years ago**, solid ice covered Ontario to depths of one to two kilometres. Because ice is of a plastic nature, it moves and pushes out at the bottom, scours the tops off mountains and hills, creates deep valleys and moves boulders large distances.

Climate change is a major challenge to our river system. Warmer water negatively affects aquatic creatures and plants. Altered weather now produces more intense, local storms than we have seen in the past. We know Milne Hollow was flooded out during a major storm 1878 and again with Hurricane Hazel in 1954. We have had several other major storms since, but with less publicity because they were localized. The East Don suffered heavily in

2005, when flash storms in both July and August drenched the Watershed around Steeles Avenue, sending record amounts of water through the ravines. The July 2013 storm was the most costly in the history of the Don. Many millions of dollars were spent restoring the bridges, channels and also the fairways in the Donalda Golf Course located immediately north of Lawrence Avenue. The far bank shows one example of stabilization, an attempt to reduce erosion of the bank. You will see other types of bank stabilization during the walk.

6 You are surrounded by **invasive plants**, species that are not native to this area but have arrived through various means and now reproduce so aggressively that they displace native species. Non-native or alien species came from other countries, possibly centuries ago.

Buckthorn is a very fast growing bush adaptable to any condition. These shrubs are easily identified by long thorns or spikes along the branches. Its roots may exude a chemical effect that discourages other species from growing and because its seeds have a laxative effect on birds, the seeds are dropped far, wide and frequently.

Dog-strangling Vine, or Pale Swallowwort, is possibly the worst plague to affect our valleys. Most of what you see here on the ground and twining upward onto shrubs and trees is that culprit. It has no enemies, tolerates sun and dense shade and produces 30,000 seeds per square metre. Seeds each have a fluffy attachment that

allows the seeds to be carried great distances. Sadly, no single method or combination of methods are able to eradicate Dog-strangling Vine. All we can hope for is the development of a biological control, but that will take several years. In the meantime, native plants, large and small, are being smothered.

In early spring, flowers of **Garlic Mustard** are seen throughout the valleys. However, Garlic Mustard grows very quickly, especially in disturbed areas, and shades out slower growing native plants. Clumps produce over 62,000 seeds per square metre. Attempts to eradicate this plant by hand-pulling has limited success for the cut or pulled flowers can still form viable seed if left on the ground. All vegetation matter must be bagged, removed from the site and disposed of properly.

The invasive grass is that tall erect plant you saw near the first pond. This is **Phragmites or Giant Reed**. It grows quickly in wetlands, spreading through underground runners and seeds. Here in Milne Hollow, attempts at control focus mainly on cutting the seed heads and removing them from the site.

Control and elimination of invasive species is difficult and long-term. Spraying with herbicides is now tightly controlled, access to the infested areas is often difficult, natural disease and predators are usually non-existent and hand pulling, digging or cutting is time-consuming often ineffective. Each plant shades the ground beneath it, discouraging the growth of many native species.

7 Above you is the active CPR track, passing over the trail on a high viaduct as it connects Toronto with Ottawa and beyond. This track is the same one that passes through Rosedale and near Summerhill at Yonge.

8 You now cross this **new bridge** to the west side of the river and yes, there are **salmon** in the East Don, but only in the fall. Back in the early 1800s, the Don teemed with Atlantic Salmon, but these were completely depleted by anglers. In 1997, Chinook Salmon, a Pacific variety, was introduced to the Lower Don River near Pottery Road and more recently to the East Don River at Donalda Golf Course just the other side of Lawrence. Each fall, usually in October, large Chinook fight their way up past this stretch, traveling north of Highway 7 up into Vaughan. TRCA built rocky ramps to replace weirs that acted as barriers. While salmon head north to breed then die, their trip is in vain because silt contained in large amounts of runoff smothers the eggs and kills them. Brown Trout are also stocked in the Don and can be seen traveling upstream in the spring.

There were **no "good old days"** for fish once the Europeans arrived. Clear cutting of land caused rises in water temperatures, sawmills blanketed the river with sawdust and homes, and industry discharged human waste and other chemicals direct into the river. Today, only 21 pollutant-tolerant varieties actually breed in the Watershed, down from the 42 that were once here. After a storm, road

surfaces contribute debris, oil, grease, bacteria, salt and cigarette butts and golf courses contribute excessive amounts of fertilizer and pesticide. Runoff also contains waste from many types of animals and from industry and residential areas. No wonder there are so few fish.

9 To illustrate the rise and fall of water levels along the East Don River, Toronto artist Robert Sprachman created this **art installation** called High Water Mark. The rocks show the relative levels at eight-year intervals over the past century, although not necessarily at this spot.

> Exit The path past the bridge rises sharply to Concorde Place, eventually leading to Eglinton Avenue East. This is a possible spot to leave the valley.

10 Walk back the way you came and cross the river over the first bridge you passed on your walk.

11 You now see the famous **Rainbow Tunnel** landmark seen from the Don Valley Parkway. Railway tracks run the length of the Don, all built when railroad was king, and valleys deemed wastelands. This tunnel passes under the CNR tracks, laid in 1907, to originally connect Union Station with northern and western Canada.

12 The East Don River valley is a heavily stressed waterway, even before the scar left by the **Don Valley Parkway** built in the early 1960s. This highway carries 6500 cars each hour, all contributing particulates to the road for the next runoff event and

particulates and gases to pollute our air.

13 You are now in **Moccasin Trail Park**, an eight-hectare, well-used neighbourhood park accessible from The Donway East following Moccasin Trail here to this parking lot. The trees on the slopes are remnants of valuable forest, now uncommon in Toronto.

14 Originally, stormwater went directly into the river carrying with it various chemicals from the roads. This **pond system** was created in 2003-2005 to prevent flooding along the East Don and on the Don Valley parkway. The ponds collect water from 70 hectares of residential Don Mills and The Shops of Don Mills plus 8 hectares on Greenbelt Drive.

Pond construction is complex. Runoff water from the southern slope passes through a narrow channel, then a wider one lined with boulders. These slow the speed of the flow and allow heavy sediment to settle before it collects in the large ponds. The same happens at the north end for runoff from the northern and western slopes. Ridges of soil separate the two ponds, but these can be seen only in dry weather. As water depth increases in the ponds, the cleaner surface water flows towards the East Don River through a narrow channel emptying into a drainage ditch along the Parkway. Another outlet sends less clean water into the East Don in cases of heavy rain or fast-melting snow. While this looks like any ordinary pond, it is really an engineered filtration system designed to improve the quality of water flowing into Lake Ontario.

> Exit This access road from the parking lot rises sharply to Don Mills Road via Moccasin Trail roadway and the Donway East. The Shops of Don Mills complex and TTC stops are on Don Mills Road.

15 For Lawrence Avenue East, retrace along the path, back through the tunnels, over the bridge and turn left back to the Old Lawrence parking lot.

16 Look back over the recently planted areas such as the upland and lowland reforested areas back on the slope, the dry meadow over near the lookout, the riparian or river bank planting between the pond and the river and the wet meadow closer to Milne House.

Remember, much of what you see behind you was not here a decade ago. Milne Hollow is the northern gateway to the **Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve that runs from Lawrence Avenue East** to the Forks of the Don near O'Connor Drive. This long stretch of greenspace was named to honour Charles Sauriol, a conservationist and resident of the Don watershed with a vision to protect natural spaces and create corridors through which wildlife can pass.

Milne Hollow is here for you to enjoy. Return often because each season is different. Share the valley with others and most importantly, do your part to keep it healthy and free of litter.

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



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

MILNE HOLLOW WALK

