

# Walk *the* Don

**TAYLOR MASSEY CREEK** (Victoria Park to the Forks of the Don River) Taylor Massey Creek takes its name from the two families that owned the land the creek flows through. The Taylor family of paper mill fame owned the land west of Dawes Road to the Forks of the Don and the Massey Family's Dentonia Farm occupied the land east of Dawes Road to Pharmacy Avenue. It was also known as Silver Creek in the past.

Taylor Massey Creek has its headwaters near the 401 and Pharmacy Avenue and flows west to join the East Don River near Don Mills Road and the Don Valley Parkway. The creek flows through a variety of habitats, including wetlands, meadows, woodlands and mowed picnic areas. Two tributaries, Ferris Creek and Curity Creek, flow into Taylor Massey Creek. Trails are heavily used by cyclists, dog walkers and pedestrians. The creek suffers from fast flows and erosion due to the large number of storm sewers feeding into it.



**Getting there;** FBy TTC: take the Bloor-Danforth subway or Victoria Park bus #24 to Victoria Park subway station. Cross at the lights to the west side of the street and walk north on Victoria Park Avenue to the stairway entering the ravine. If you don't like stairs, you can go further across the bridge to the paved trail down the hill.

**Getting home;** From Don Mills Road and Overlea Boulevard-Gateway Boulevard, take either the #25 bus going north on Don Mills Road or #100 bus west on Overlea to the Bloor-Danforth subway at Pape or Broadview stations. From Thorncliffe Park Drive, take the #81 bus to Pape station.

\*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:** There are parking lots at the Dawes Road entrance to the park just north of Crescent Town Road. Follow the trail back under Dawes Road to the starting point of the walk. For a shorter walk, follow the trail at the far end of the parking lot and skip to Point 6.



**Level of Difficulty/Accessibility:** Mainly on paved trails. Unpaved and steep portions can be easily avoided by skipping points 3 and 4.



**Approximate Time:** 2.5 hours.



**Distance:** 6.3 kilometres.



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

## Victoria Park to Dawes Road

- 1** Descend the stairs or take the trail from Victoria Park Avenue to the valley. At the junction where these trails meet, you will find a map and welcome sign. This marks the beginning of the walk.
- 2** After reading the sign, continue west on the paved path. You will see lots of giant ragweed (a major source of fall allergies) along the trail. Take the gravel trail on your right to a newly constructed wetland and lookout that offers a good view of pond life. You'll see the usual mallard ducks, red-winged blackbirds, dragonflies and damselflies. Continue along the trail and read the interpretive signs on your right about the importance of wetlands. There are some interesting native plants in these wetlands, including blue flag iris, (June) joe pyeweed and swamp milkweed (late summer).  
  
Continue along this path until it merges again with the main trail. About 70 feet (20 metres) further along on the right-hand side is a grassy area leading to a dirt path that leads up a hill to a second wetland area below the Goulding Estate.  
  
You can skip this loop (points 3 and 4) if you have issues with accessibility and need to remain on the paved trail. If you are able, however, where the trails meet again further along go a short distance up the trail on your right to read the interpretive signs about the wildlife found in the area. Then

come back down to the main trail to continue on.

- 3** Follow the grass and dirt path up the hill. At the clearing at the top of the hill, stop at the bench and lookout that has a view over the pond. Take one of the dirt trails leading up from the clearing to view the Goulding Estate and then return
- 4** The Goulding Estate, built in 1921, was the home of Dorothy Massey Goulding, daughter of Walter and Susan (Denton) Massey and part of the original Dentonia Farm where the Masseys had a large dairy operation and introduced pasteurized milk to Toronto. The estate is now home to the Children's Peace Theatre.
- 5** After viewing the pond, continue along the trail. On your left, across from the parking lot, stop to read the interpretive signs about the wildlife found in the area and then continue to the main trail.

As you continue towards the Dawes Road bridge, you will see large rocks called armour stone and smaller stones held in place by wire mesh lining the creek. These are called gabion baskets. Gabion baskets are used to line the edge of the creek to protect structures and prevent erosion of the riverbanks. These gabion baskets are in good shape. However, further along in the walk, you'll notice some of these baskets are starting to fail. Gabions typically start to fail when the wire basket rusts and opens at the bottom of the gabion wall,

releasing the materials inside. Once the bottom materials are lost, the top gabions have nothing to hold them up and the entire structure becomes unstable.

Where possible, engineers are now replacing these baskets with more natural solutions that will provide long-term protection of structures from erosion. Natural channel realignment, plantings, placement of natural materials such as logs and large stones (like the armour stones you see here) and bank regrading are just some of the solutions being used. Further along in the walk, you will see a good example of logs being used to protect against erosion.

It is important to note that erosion is a naturally occurring process. However, urbanization of the surrounding area has caused the rate of erosion to accelerate. Erosion control measures are used when erosion causes a risk to people, property or infrastructure.

Clem Dawes, for whom Dawes Road was named, was an early farmer who ran a hotel at Dawes Road and Danforth Avenue. Dawes Road, which at the time ran south from Finch Avenue and is now what we now call Victoria Park Avenue, connected with Kingston Road. From the 1830s on, it was a major thoroughfare for farmers in Scarborough and North York to get their produce to the St. Lawrence Market.

## Dawes Road to Woodbine

- 6** After you pass under Dawes Road and cross the pedestrian bridge, you will see an area to the left that was planted with serviceberry, grey dogwood, basswood and sugar maple. The hillsides to the right, where the Park Vista Apartments are, were brickyards at one time and later were used as landfill sites.
- 7** There is an entrance to the valley here from Dawes Road and a parking lot with washrooms just beyond the parking lot. Washrooms are usually open from the Victoria Day weekend in May until Thanksgiving, from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Just to the left of the washrooms behind the weeping willows, is a remnant marsh fed by natural springs in the hillside. The blooms of marsh marigolds can be seen here in spring and joe pyeweed and boneset in late summer. Continue through the parking lot where you will once again meet up with the trail. The area just past the parking lot is popular for picnics and family activities. There is a drinking water fountain just past the parking lot if you are thirsty.

The creek is now on your right. Along this next stretch there are several possible diversions where bridges cross the creek and lead to local streets or informal dirt trails along the north side of the creek. This walk will remain on the main trail.

**8** Just before the first bridge (Halsey Avenue), you will see a pipe leading into the creek. This is a storm sewer outfall. There are many of these along Taylor Massey Creek. These storm sewer outfalls bring stormwater runoff, generated when it rains or the snow melts, into the creek. This stormwater carries pollutants such as animal waste, road salt, grease and oil to the creek. In addition to this runoff, Taylor Massey Creek also receives raw sewage during heavy rainfall events as the pipes in older areas of the city were designed to carry both storm and sanitary wastewater. During heavy or prolonged rainfall, the capacity of these combined sewers is exceeded and they will overflow, causing diluted untreated sewage to go directly into the river. Stormwater and the wastewater generated during these overflows continue to be primary sources of pollution in Taylor Massey Creek and the Don River. To address these issues, the City of Toronto created the Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan. Completed in 2003, this 25-year plan will utilize various methods to manage combined sewer overflows and stormwater runoff discharges into the city's rivers and creeks and Lake Ontario.

At this point along the trail, you can see some of the failing gabion baskets discussed earlier. Continue along the main trail and do not cross the bridge.

**9** This stretch of the valley between Dawes Road and O'Connor Drive on the left-hand side is considered to be an environmentally significant area. Here you will find a network of seepage slopes where groundwater feeds a number of different kinds of wetlands, including a mineral fen meadow marsh, which is a community of regional conservation concern. Numerous plant species of regional conservation concern are associated with the mineral fen community, including a few that are very rare in the Toronto region. The groundwater is associated with an old sand-and-gravel bar in East York that originated as part of the glacial Lake Iroquois coastal environment, the same sand-and-gravel bar that causes the creek to flow in a westerly direction.

You will see many cattails and horsetails from the path and the trail is often flooded. Red-winged blackbirds and goldfinches are common in these marshes. Listen for birds singing. In the late summer or early fall, you may also see the orange flowers of spotted jewelweed, white flowers of white snakeroot and those of turtlehead, an aptly named native wildflower. Attractive to butterflies, this plant provides a food source for the regionally rare Baltimore checkerspot butterfly.

As you continue walking, you will pass two more wooden bridges leading to informal trails on the opposite side of the creek.

**10** At the silver maples, you will come to a fork in the path. To the left, there is a paved trail going up a hill to the parking lot at the end of Haldon Avenue and to the left of this trail on the grassy hill is a platform with four benches. Take the right-hand fork and continue straight ahead along the path.

On your right, a steel barricade is above a large storm sewer outfall. From here, if you look to the left across the creek, you can see where the Ferris Creek tributary enters into Taylor Massey Creek.

Further along the trail, there is a bridge to the north side of the creek where there is a stairway up to Glenwood Crescent. Do not cross this bridge; continue on the south side of the creek.

Beyond this bridge, there is another storm sewer outfall on the right and a picnic circle on your left. A path leads to a steep staircase up to Stan Wadlow Park and Parkside School on Cedarvale Avenue near Woodbine Avenue and Cosburn Avenue where TTC is available. Just beyond and to the left is a drinking water fountain and washroom building. Washrooms are usually open Victoria Day weekend to Thanksgiving, from 7:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

### Woodbine to the Forks

After crossing beneath the Woodbine Bridge, continue to follow the paved trail.

Past the Woodbine Bridge, the slopes on both sides of the creek are well wooded and stable due to the large amount of vegetation growing on them and the comparative lack of human activity. These slopes are mostly privately owned and remain relatively undisturbed.

Up the hill on the left, there is a hydro corridor that was formerly a railway line. On either side of the path under the hydro lines, there are remnants of natural woodland. There are tall red oaks, witch hazel, white birches, bracken ferns and many flower species.

In the next stretch of the trail, you will see three areas where the trail had to be relocated because the creek changed course and washed out the pathway.

**11** To the left just before the first fork in the trail, is a new restoration area planted by the TRCA in September and October 2011, ending where the old trail is submerged. Stay to the right and cross over the creek. You will have a good view of the washout if you look downstream of the bridge.

There are three Turkish filbert trees in the grassy area on the left with interesting clusters of nuts.

**12** Keep right at the second fork in the trail. To the left just before the bridge is a patch of native Virginia waterleaf and mayapple that bloom in spring and zigzag goldenrod blooming in late summer surrounded by invasive garlic mustard, dog strangling vine and urban avens.

Stay to the right and cross the bridge that crosses over Curity Creek, another small tributary of Taylor Massey Creek. The tributary converges with the main branch of Taylor Massey Creek just downstream of the bridge. Here you may see chickadees and woodpeckers. You can also occasionally see or hear kingfishers along the creek.

**13** To the right there is a deciduous forest on the north slope with a variety of tree species, including sugar maple, red oak, white oak, white ash, basswood, beech, black cherry, white elm, mountain maple, Manitoba maple and an understory of trillium, trout lily, bloodroot, Virginia waterleaf, blue cohosh, false Solomon's seal, wild ginger, zigzag and blue-stemmed goldenrod and wild leek.

Mountain biking and off-leash dogs have taken a toll on the wooded hillside in this area, resulting in the loss of plants and causing soil erosion and compaction. There has been a long history in the Don of the creation of informal trails by various user groups. Many municipalities, including the City of Toronto, have begun to realize the damage these

informal trails are having on our natural areas and are now addressing this issue.

On the right, just before the stairway up to Alder Road, you will find Canada anemone with white flowers during the summer; past the stairs just before the next bridge is a nice stand of sweet cicely, a native plant with white flowers in May and early June.

**14** Just past the bridge crossing to the south side of the creek, there is a small building with a solar panel on its roof. The building is one of 14 automated monitoring stations installed along Toronto watercourses by the TRCA and the City of Toronto. Combined with the TRCA's water quality efforts for the Regional Watershed Monitoring Program, the TRCA monitors water conditions during storm events and in dry weather to help evaluate the city's Wet Weather Flow Management Master Plan and the overall health of the city's surface water. Powered by solar energy, this station has been designed to operate remotely using wireless technology and is capable of functioning 365 days a year. Water quality parameters, including nutrients, metals, bacteria and general chemistry, are analyzed monthly.

You'll notice more armour stones have been placed near the bridge and gabion baskets beyond to help protect the structure. If you cross this bridge, there is a steep stairway (about 130 steps) up to Cullen Bryant Park at the

top of Coxwell Boulevard at Taylor Drive. There is a TTC stop at Coxwell Avenue and O'Connor Drive.

**15** Stay on the north path to continue. A short distance along the trail, you will come to the third fork in the trail. Stay to the right to avoid the washed-out trail. You will continue on the north side of the creek to the next bridge. In this area on the north bank of the creek, there are new erosion control structures built with logs after the gabion baskets washed out. There is a picnic area in a clearing to the right.

Further along you will cross a bridge back to the south side of the creek. Notice the purple-flowering raspberries in this area. Follow the trail to the right and continue past the parking lot. Beside the parking lot you will notice a construction site for the Coxwell Trunk Sewer bypass.

Follow the trail under the Don Valley Parkway (DVP). To the right just before the DVP, you will see a temporary construction road to accommodate work on a storm sewer and hydro installations and just beyond is a solar panel associated with the Elevated Wetlands.

### The Forks of the Don

**16** This area is called the Forks of the Don and also houses the Elevated Wetlands, a project created in 1997 that pumps water up from the river using a pump powered by solar energy. The water is passed through a series of structures containing plants

where it is cleansed naturally, then trickles down to a wetland below. The water eventually re-enters the river cleaner than it was before. It was thought this technology might help developing nations that don't have access to clean water. There are also some lovely native wetland plants in this area such as blue vervain, swamp milkweed and lobelia. Read the interpretive sign located at the intersection just past the bridge for an explanation of the operation.

Here at the forks you have options. You can follow the sign to the Lower Don Recreational Trail, which will take you west under Don Mills Road to see the Forks of the Don where the West Don and East Don Rivers join to become the Lower Don River. From this point, you can follow the Forks of the Don Walk and after that the Lower Don Walk all the way to the mouth of the river at Keating Channel or join the waterfront trail near Lake Shore Blvd.

**17** Complete this walk by crossing the concrete bridge to the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve and following the trail north. Looking upstream, from the right side of the bridge, you can get a view of the fork where Taylor Massey Creek converges with the East Don River. On a boulder on the left after crossing the bridge and just before the parking lot, is a plaque about the Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve. Charles Sauriol was a great conservationist and supporter of the Don River who had a cottage on the land here until it was expropriated for construction of the



Don Valley Parkway. Charles Sauriol wrote many books on life in the Don in the early days that are available in public libraries.

**18** Continue through the parking lot to meet back up with the trail, which will take you across the wooden Bailey Bridge over the railway tracks. The Don Valley Parkway can be seen on your right and Don Mills Road on your left. Climb the wooden stairs and follow the trail up to Don Mills Road and Overlea Boulevard, where buses are available.

If you have trouble with stairs, you can go down the wooden ramp to the left instead of up the stairs and follow the trail past the parking lot, cross the bridge over the West Don and continue to the right up the hill to Thorncliffe Park Drive and TTC to the Bloor-Danforth subway line.

You can also walk through E.T. Seton Park up to the Ontario Science Centre or to Eglinton Avenue or continue on into Sunnybrook, Wilket Creek or Serena Gundy Parks. It seems all paths lead to the Forks of the Don.

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## Trail Users' Guide

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- 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 them.
- Do not pick or damage any vegetation.
- Beware of Poison Ivy: "Leaflets of three, let it be."
- Do not feed the 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.donriver.ca](http://www.donriver.ca)



Prepared by the Don Watershed Regeneration Council & Toronto and Region Conservation Authority  
in collaboration with **Toronto Field Naturalists**.

# TAYLOR MASSEY CREEK WALK

