

# Walk *the* Don

## FORKS OF THE DON

This walk begins along the West Don River, crosses to the East Don River and then passes the Forks of the Don where the two tributaries unite to form the Lower Don River. This section of the Don Valley, once heavily industrialized, now struggles to regain a natural state, and is often hampered by flood damage from heavy storms.



**Public Transit: Getting there:** From Eglinton Station, take bus route 34, 54, or 100 to the Leslie Street stop. On the south side of Eglinton Avenue East, take the set of stairs down into a parking lot. This walk will begin at the far end of the parking lot.

**Getting home:** A 10-minute walk east up Pottery Road leads to Broadview Avenue, where you can take any TTC bus south to Broadview subway 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.



**Parking:** Drive into the first entrance into the park system on the west side of Leslie Street just north of Eglinton Avenue. The sign says “Wilket Creek and Sunnybrook Parks”. No matter how the road twists and turns, always keep to your left. You will drive under Eglinton Avenue East and enter a parking lot. This walk begins at the far (east) end of this parking lot. There is also a parking lot at the rear of the Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum across Pottery Road from the end point of the walk.



**Level of Difficulty/Accessibility:** The trail surface varies from pavement to some compacted soil and there are also steps/ramps where the trail is not stroller or wheelchair friendly.



**Approximate Time:** 3 hours.



**Distance:** 6.0 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 east end of the parking lot at the north end of E.T. Seton Park. Ernest Thompson Seton (1860-1946) was an internationally known author, naturalist, conservationist, youth leader and lecturer. Much of his life and work focused on the Don watershed. There are two paths heading east. Take the path to your right that goes over a concrete bridge. From the bridge, watch the flow of the **West Don River**. The height of the water and its rate of flow varies with the weather. The water will be higher and flowing faster after a significant **wet weather event**. It will also look muddy from the disturbed sediment. The plants on both sides of the trail are mainly **invasive species**. The two most common are garlic mustard and dog-strangling vine. The former has stalks with white flowers in the spring. The latter grows into long vines with tiny maroon flowers later in the summer. In the fall you will see plenty

of goldenrod. There are many species of goldenrod and all are native. In spite of what many people think, **no species of Goldenrod causes any form of allergies**. Their pollen is very heavy and sticky and attracts many insects, including bees. Pollen must be windborne to cause allergies. The pollen of ragweed, oak trees and many types of grasses is windborne and so may cause allergies.

2 Continue walking over a second concrete bridge. This location indicates the river's original course. To the right, erosion was undercutting the land above which several industries are located. After much discussion and public consultation, it was decided the best action was to divert this short section of the **West Don River** to reduce future erosion problems. Note that many shrubs and trees were planted after construction work was completed.

**3** Cross a low bridge with a wooden floor and metal railings. The water flowing beneath it is the **West Don River** following its new diverted pathway.

**4** Note the name on the **Lung Cancer Canada Grove** sign. It almost makes it sound as if we are honouring lung cancer. Of course, the sign really means that trees here honour victims and survivors of this terrible disease.

**5** There's a large area of mowed grass. The public desires mowed grass because it looks tidy and is good for picnics. Others see mowed grass as a missed opportunity to carry out some forest restoration work. On the right, you will see a clump of evergreen trees. They are native white spruce. During the summer, look among the branches of these trees and see many vines with dark green leaves and maybe also pale, greenish-yellow pods. Later in the summer and fall, these pods are beige and release seeds with fluffy attachments. This plant is dog-strangling vine and is a very invasive perennial. If you look among the trees' branches during the winter and early spring you will see very thin beige threads. These are last year's dead vines. In the spring, new vines sprout from the soil and climb higher and higher using last year's dead vines as ladders.

**6** To your left, past the white spruces, note a low brown building with a lot of glass. This

structure is the lowest level of the **Ontario Science Centre**.

**7** Look at the slope on the far side of the river, where you will see an abundance of Phragmites, a tall plant with thin leaves and a brownish plume of flowers and/or seeds. These plants extend a considerable distance up the slope. The position of these plants indicates lots of available water in the soil. In the winter, you might be able to see a frozen ice layer directly on the slope that confirms the presence of groundwater discharge or seepage from the slope.

**8** You will come to a fork in the trail. Take the trail to the right. (Taking the left path, you will exit the valley and reach Don Mills Road with access to TTC buses.) Note the life-saving post on your right. It should have an orange ring and a long hook. This equipment is a reminder of the dangers during heavy rain or sudden snow melting when the river's water level rises quickly and its rate of flow increases drastically.

**9** Along the trail, you will notice plants that have very large green leaves. This plant is common or giant burdock. It is sometimes referred to as wild rhubarb but is not related to it. Common burdock produces only rosettes of these large leaves in its first year. In the second year, the plant produces one or more tall branched stalks that will have spiny green orbs topped with tiny purple flowers. When the flowers die, the spiny spheres turn

brown and grab onto any clothing or fur that touches them. Each of these burrs contains many seeds that are dispersed when the burrs are torn off the clothing or fur and discarded. Common burdock only lives for two years, but its abundant seeds, with their very efficient dispersal mechanism, ensure a future filled with more of these plants.

**10** Note the old brown painted fence on the right. On the right, past the end of the painted fence, **there is a good example of a snag**. Snags are dead trees that often remain standing for years, and snags are a valuable component of any natural ecosystems. They provide shelter and/or lookouts for a wide variety of creatures. Many animals also find food in the cavities or under any remaining bark. When snags fall, they provide food and shelter to a different group of organisms. When they decompose, ultimately they add nutrients to the soil.

**11** On your left, but not usually visible, is an archery range. Just past the painted fence, you will see a small mowed path of grass to your left. If you're interested, follow this mowed path to the large, fenced archery range to see if anyone is practicing his or her skills. Do not enter the fenced area.

**12** Walk under the hydroelectric lines. There is another brown fence on your right. On your left is a tree with four trunks and another near it with two trunks. These trees, plus

others in this same grove of trees, are crack willows, a common non-native species of willow planted years ago along many rivers throughout southern Ontario.

**13** Once you are past the hydroelectric wires, you will note a large expansive bridge ahead carrying traffic over the valley on Overlea Boulevard. There is a small, covered picnic shelter. There is also a drinking fountain and washrooms, but these operate only seasonally (usually June 1 – Sept. 1).

**14** You will reach a round parking lot. Stay on the paved path as it goes through the centre of the parking lot. There are a few picnic tables in this area. Just past another parking lot a sign indicates Bike Route 45 south and a wayfinding sign that mentions Taylor Creek and Victoria Park subway station. Both signs point to a small paved road to the left. Follow this small paved path that will take you away from the **West Don River**.

**15** Between the path and a heavily used railway line, there is a lot of stinging nettle, a plant that can cause significant burning sensations when it touches skin. Stay out of this area and away from the railway line.

**16** As you pass under Don Mills Road, follow the old, narrow wooden ramp upwards. Between the ramp and the railway tracks, there is more Phragmites, the tall plant with feathery plumes at the top. You will also notice more dog-strangling vines

that have climbed quite high into the trees and shrubs. The reason the lower tree/shrub branches are dead is because the long vines have not allowed enough light to reach the lower leaves of the trees/shrubs. Some of these trees and shrubs are also covered in wild grape, another vine that can cause serious damage to the plants on which it grows.

**17** At the top of the ramp, installed in 2012, there is access to Don Mills Road and the TTC off to the left. The new steel bridge to your right follows Bike Route 45 south over the railway tracks. The road with the heavy traffic is the Don Valley Parkway.

**18** The walk continues southward on the opposite side of the railway tracks. If you see stalks with small purple flowers, they are purple loosestrife. People used to think that this plant was a nasty invasive, but studies have now shown that it really does not take over an area as once thought. At the south end of a small parking lot, note the bronze plaque on a rock to your right about the **Charles Sauriol Conservation Reserve** and the map showing the very elongated shape of this special area.

**19** The rounded, concrete bridge passes over the **East Don River**. Straight ahead, you will see the **elevated wetlands**. Take the path to your right (Bike Route 45 south). Read the sign describing the original purpose of these structures. Solar-

powered pumps lift water from the Don River into the structures. The water then cascades down into a small wetland at ground level and ultimately returns to the river. Within the structures, native plant species were originally planted in a substrate of shredded plastic and tires. The City performs regular maintenance on the structures and the surrounding wetlands to ensure that the pumps are working properly and to remove any non-native plants that grow within the structure or the ponds at the base.

**20** Follow the wooden ramp upwards after you've passed under Don Mills Road again. Directly beside you is the **East Don River**. Look to your right along the far bank to see the **West Don River** merging with it — hence the name “Forks of the Don” — to form the **Lower Don River** from here to Lake Ontario. (Just north of the forks, Taylor Massey Creek joins the East Don River.)

**21** Along both sides of the trail are many staghorn sumacs. Their young branches and leaf buds are covered with a fine fuzz much like the horns of young deer. Each bright-green leaf has many small leaflets. This native plant turns a vivid red in the fall and adds a lot of colour to the Don Valley. There is also a lot of Virginia creeper and more dog-strangling vine in this area. What may appear to be mounds of lush green vegetation are often small shrubs completely covered and killed by these two vines. Virginia creeper is a native plant, but it can be invasive in

certain circumstances. It's particularly good in an area where very little plant life can survive.

**22** When fast-flowing water passes a curve in a river, it erodes the bank on the outside of the curve, while depositing silt on the inside of the curve. This action illustrates how rivers migrate naturally. In an urban setting, such river migration causes a variety of problems. Between a low metal rail fence and the river, and also in the left side of the trail, large pieces of natural stone have been installed to reduce erosion. Many types of plants grow along this trail. Common mullein has tall stalks with pale yellow flowers and very fuzzy leaves at ground level. Sometimes there is a rosette of large fuzzy leaves without a flower stalk. You may also see tall brown stalks bearing only the seed pods from previous years. Teasel has a tall stalk with a prickly-looking globe with a ring of pale, purple flowers. The prickly structures turn brown and remain for years. Late summer is when you will see the biggest variety of wildflowers. There also may be sightings of groundhogs, beavers, red foxes, raccoons, coyotes and White-tailed deer. The ducks you see will usually be mallards. The most common large bird seen above this part of the **Don Valley** is the red-tailed Hawk.

**23** Look along the far bank of the river and note the large number of trees that seem to have a major portion of their roots exposed. They did not grow this way. Their roots

used to be covered with soil, but rising water levels in the **Don River** and excessive slope runoff has eroded the soil away from them. With less soil to anchor their roots, these trees succumb to heavy winds and topple into the river. Along the far bank, you may also see small shrubs and tall grasses lying down with their tops pointed downstream, the result of a recent heavy rain that caused a rise in the water level and increase in the speed of the water. Watch out for locations where the trail you are following may have been washed out.

**24** The trail now moves slightly away from the river. There are trees now between the trail and the river, plus lots of different kinds of flowers. The trail now goes under another hydroelectric line. The bridge ahead is the Millwood Bridge. Note how the Don Valley Parkway was constructed halfway up the slope rather than at the bottom of the valley.

Closer to the bridge, the open area seems to present an opportunity for restoration work, but possibilities are limited because of the hydro lines.

**25** The trail curves and has a lot of vegetation on both sides. Look to your right, across the **Lower Don River**, and see a fence and mowed grass surrounding the **North Toronto Sewage Treatment Plant**. You may not actually see the building. Note the paved road coming down the far slope toward the river to the left of the facility.



**26** Crothers Woods is the wooded area to the left of this facility. It extends also behind and to the right of the facility. Crothers Woods contains many mature trees, including black walnut, red and white oak, butternut, hickory, american beech and sugar maple and is one of Ontario's most northerly and easterly pockets of **Carolinian forest**. A trail management plan has been prepared by the City of Toronto to help protect the trees and understorey from various forms of overuse by walkers, cyclists and dogs. Implementation of this plan was about 80 per cent complete by 2011.

**27** Stop to read the information on the sign facing away from the trail and then continue walking straight ahead. A lot of the trees in this somewhat open area are trembling aspens. Even the slightest breeze makes the leaves tremble. At the next trail intersection, continue walking straight ahead. The area to the right across the railway tracks and behind some trees/shrubs is very flat and has been used for years as a City snow dump. In spite of the large snowfall in 2007, it was not used and, in 2009, the area was completely removed from the list of snow dump areas. Toronto Parks, Forestry, and Recreation plans to restore this area with several interesting features. Note that this area lies between the railway line and the **Lower Don River**.

**28** The wooden rail fence on your left separates a restored wetland from the trail. Stop and read the sign about **Beechwood Wetland**. The initial work to create ponds and remove invasives was done by machines, but then volunteers took over to plant a huge variety of native species. They continue to work to keep invasive species from once again taking over the area.

**29** Further along on the right, you can observe the railway tracks crossing the river. The trail is now directly beside the **Lower Don River**. Just past hydro post #204, look into the water and see a weir creating a small waterfall. This structure is made of cement and there are pieces of metal overhanging the lip of the weir to prevent sea lampreys from migrating upstream. This also prevents the movement of non-jumping fish species, but does allow rainbow trout and chinook salmon to continue up the river. Because fish have difficulty getting over a high weir, an extended rocky ramp has been created on the downstream side of the weir to raise the water level below the barrier. This has created **spawning areas** for species such as white sucker and deep resting pools for migrating fish.

**30** When you reach Pottery Road, go out the little path to the right. Be very careful of vehicular traffic! Directly across from this little path is an opening in one side of a double concrete barrier. Cross one lane of traffic coming from your left,

to the space between the concrete barriers. Walk to your left and find the end of the second barrier allowing you to cross the second lane of traffic coming from your right. Follow Pottery Road to your left, but walk behind the guardrail if you can.

**31** Turn right into the entrance to **Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum** and find the parking lot at the rear of this property, or walk up Pottery Road to reach Broadview Avenue to get a bus to Broadview subway station.

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## Trail Users' Guide

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- 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](http://www.trca.ca)



# FORKS OF THE DON WALK

