

Walk *the* Don

LOWER DON (Pottery Road to Cherry Street)

Imagine a Lower Don River, in the late 1800s, teeming with salmon and meandering through wide marshes and tree-lined banks. Imagine the 1900s, with its engineered, channelized watercourse and its banks lined with polluting industries. This degradation of the valley was compounded by the addition of the Don Valley Parkway. Today, the Lower Don is the site of one of the largest urban environmental restoration projects in the world.



Public Transit: Getting there; From Broadview Station, all northbound buses bring you to Pottery Road (announced as Mortimer). Walk 10 minutes down Pottery Road to Todmorden Mills.

Getting home; Either walk north on Cherry Street to Mill Street or walk south on Cherry Street to Lakeshore Boulevard to take the 72B Pape bus to Union Station.

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



Parking: From Pottery Road, enter Todmorden Mills Heritage Museum and follow the road to the parking lot.



Level of Difficulty/Accessibility: The trail is paved and level with the exception of the Todmorden Wildflower Preserve at Point 1. It is stroller and wheelchair accessible.



Approximate Time: 1 to 2 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 This walk begins in the richly historic site of **Todmorden Mills**, former location of a 19th century paper mill, brewery and gristmill. This gristmill was the second gristmill in Upper Canada, the first being on the Humber River. Construction of the Don Valley Parkway (DVP) has isolated a former oxbow of the Don River on this site. Visit the 9.2-hectare Todmorden Mills Wildflower Preserve that has examples of several native habitats, including upland forest on the slopes, bottomland forest, pond, and wet and dry meadows. In the spring, watch for yellow Marsh Marigolds, the large, bright green leaves of Skunk Cabbage and clusters of White Trilliums, Ontario's provincial flower.

Walk back towards Pottery Road, turn left (west) on Pottery Road (**NOTE: To ensure safety, please remain behind the guardrails to avoid oncoming traffic**). Pass under the DVP overpass, where you will meet

the Lower Don Trail that runs north/south. Make another left and proceed south along the trail. The Don River should be on your righthand side.

2 The trail continues down the Don, it passes through a stand of wild plum trees. Raspberry canes grow along the trail, possibly obscured by large and very invasive stands of Japanese Knotweed.

3 Notice a stream gauge house on your right, originally installed in 1962, under a cost sharing agreement between the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Canada's Water Survey Canada. Inside the gauge house, monitoring equipment measures the water level in the stilling well and records it into a logger. Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA) receives automatic polls via cellular modem every five – seven minutes where data from the logger is downloaded.

The logger also has an alarm component in its software. If water levels rise too fast or exceed a threshold level, an alarm is automatically sent to TRCA Flood Warning staff.

4 The trail rises close to the DVP and then dips down under the imposing 23-metre-high so-called **Half-mile Bridge**, stretching from one side of the valley to the other. This bridge carried Canadian Pacific Railway trains from Toronto to Montreal on the old Ontario-Quebec Railway. The bridge was re-built in the late 1920s, segment by segment, in the intervals between passages of express trains. This project was an engineering feat applauded around the world. Beneath this structure grow crowded stands of 3.5-metre high, feather-plumed Common Reed, a native species that is now considered invasive.

5 Passing the half-mile bridge, look across the river and Bayview Avenue to see the relic buildings and one remaining chimney of the **Don Valley Brick Works**. Three ponds, wildflower meadows and assorted walkways now occupy the old quarry. Mud Creek enters the Don River here after flowing through the ponds of the Brick Works. Evergreen, a national charity, has restored the heritage buildings to create Evergreen Brick Works which includes a farmers market, workshops, festivals, class rooms and studios, art installations, winter skating, a cafe and much more.

6 Pass under the lengthy ramp connecting the Bayview

Extension to the DVP. This structure is the only section of the proposed **Crosstown Expressway** to be built. The grand plan in the 1970s was for the Crosstown to connect the DVP to the Spadina Expressway, an extension of Highway 400. Fortunately, the Spadina Expressway was only partly built. The DVP, however, had already scarred the valley.

Because of so much paving and building, the Don River watershed has become degraded compared with pre-urban days. Remediation is a slow and costly process, but inroads are slowly being achieved. One example is **Helliwell's Hill Wetland Restoration Project** tucked in along the base of the DVP, off to the east of the main path.

7 The valley now opens into a wide floodplain again and passes under the **Prince Edward Viaduct**, opened in 1918, to connect Bloor Street with Danforth Avenue. Its visionary designer included a lower second deck for trains, making it possible to construct the Bloor-Danforth subway line 50 years later. Notice the big stand of Teasel along the trail. In earlier days, its dried heads were used for teasing out wool before it was woven into skeins.

8 Just past the viaduct is **Chester Springs Marsh**, which is the size of seven football fields. The original wetland was destroyed by municipal landfill between 1912 and 1925. A former group, the Task Force to Bring Back the Don raised money to create new wetlands on both sides

of the river. Once the new wetlands were completed, the areas were heavily planted with a huge variety of native plant species. Painted Turtles, American Toads, White-tailed Deer and Red Fox, along with many bird species have returned to the area. Unfortunately, the area now has many invasive species and work continues to control them.

9 Further on, the trail passes under the disused CPR railway line, close to the DVP again, and then crosses the Don River to the relative peace and quiet of its western bank. Here, the river runs straight, having been controlled severely by engineers of the past. Large Carp, tolerant of the pollution, might be seen in the murky water. Now a nuisance fish, Carp were introduced in New York waters across Lake Ontario in 1831. Early Toronto residents fished in the evening by the light of flaming torches along this part of the river. Atlantic Salmon was a popular catch.

10 A bit further south, pass under the pedestrian bridge. This bridge provides an option to climb up into **Riverdale Park** to the west or Broadview Avenue to the east. Picture the Don River, before it was channelized, meandering back and forth across this wide valley. In the first half of the 1900s, this area served as a landfill site. During and after a heavy rainfall, avoid this last section of the walk as this low area floods quickly. This portion of roadway is often closed after a major rainfall for the river is swollen with runoff water from the entire Don watershed.

Currently, the area from Riverdale Park south to Lakeshore Boulevard is called the Don Narrows. This trail section provides the only public access to the Don River through the Narrows. Vegetation here is either absent or limited to a narrow band of opportunistic trees, shrubs and grasses—usually of the invasive type. There are continuous efforts to improve the natural habitat conditions along the **Don Narrows** by controlling certain invasive plants and planting native species.

11 Continue south to pass under the Gerrard Street and Dundas Street bridges to Queen Street. Here you have the option to end your walk by accessing the stairs to Queen Street where you can access the TTC streetcar which travels west towards Union Station on the Yonge-University subway line.

12 From here, you see the massive construction project in the West Don Lands. This includes large municipal parks, recreation facilities and mixed-use housing. The dome of earth on which the buildings sit serves to divert floodwater from entering the downtown area in the event of a major storm. This area is one of the largest urban development and environmental projects in North America, with an estimated completion date of around 2040. Once complete, it will serve as an incredible example of how to sustainably connect urban development with the natural environment.

13 Take a few steps further and find an old iron **Bailey Bridge**, located beside a gray concrete bridge that is fenced. The Bailey bridge provided a crossing over the Don River in the original alignment of Eastern Avenue. To construct a Bailey bridge, no special tools or heavy equipment are required, and these bridges are well known for holding heavy loads. Because of their excellent versatility and overall value, thousands of Bailey bridges have been installed throughout the world.

14 Across the Don River and DVP stands the **BMW Building** which is a six-storey building that showcases cars vertically throughout the building, an interesting advertising plan in an area where billboards are not allowed. Originally an old soap factory, the building was stripped to its foundation and transformed into a piece of architectural artwork.

15 A section of newly constructed trail soon follows. There was significant widening of the railway crossing over the Don to improve the conveyance of flood water through this area and to greatly improve pedestrian access under the tracks. This project was completed and opened to the public in the summer of 2007 and was the first phase of the Class Environmental Assessment of the **Lower Don River West Remedial Flood Protection Project**. This project was created to offer flood protection that will eliminate the risk to life and property in approximately 210 hectares of land west of the Lower Don River.

This project required the relocation of high voltage underground power lines, which were originally located within the river channel alignment. Also aquatic habitat within the new channel section was established, and upstream from the bridge a new lookout area composed of crushed granite was constructed. The large rectangular blocks staggered along the trail and throughout the lookout area originated from the abutment of the original Grand Trunk Railway crossing over the Don River, which was in existence between the 1850s and late 1920s. Remnants of the railway abutment on the other side of the Don River currently hold up a portion of the DVP.

Beside the trail is a high rise of land called Corktown Common. Located atop a flood protection landform, this berm prevents floodwater from reaching the downtown core during a very heavy storm. A tunnel leads from the main trail to the park above with newly created wetlands, woods, prairies, paths and activity areas. It is worth visiting before you proceed further along.

16 Further south notice an old green iron bridge that is owned by Hydro One and holds high voltage underground cables. This is a new part of an old city. The trail may be rerouted until it is finalized, so follow the signs or markers as you proceed.

17 The trail begins to curve just under the off-ramp to the Gardiner Expressway. This area is being remediated to remove

contamination as part of the Don Mouth Naturalization and Port Lands Flood Protection Project and the North Keating Precinct Development site.

18 Find a fork in the trail. To continue on this walk, stay on the right (west) side of the trail, to shortly cross over railway tracks. Going left will bring you across the river to the stop lights at Lakeshore Boulevard.

19 Come to a small intersection and continue walking west following the Gardiner Expressway on your left. To your right, see the Don Yard Go Station. Follow the signs

carefully as the trail often follows detours.

20 This walk comes to an end at Lakeshore Boulevard East and Cherry Street. You can visit the historically rich Distillery District walking north on Cherry Street. Alternatively, you can walk south on Cherry Street to view the Keating Channel. If you enjoyed your walk and would like to continue on, access the Martin Goodman Trail. Walk south on Cherry Street, passing under the Gardiner Expressway and follow trail signs. This trail brings you alongside Toronto's beautiful waterfront from the Eastern Beaches to the Western Beaches, stretching for 20 kilometres.

Trail Users' Guide

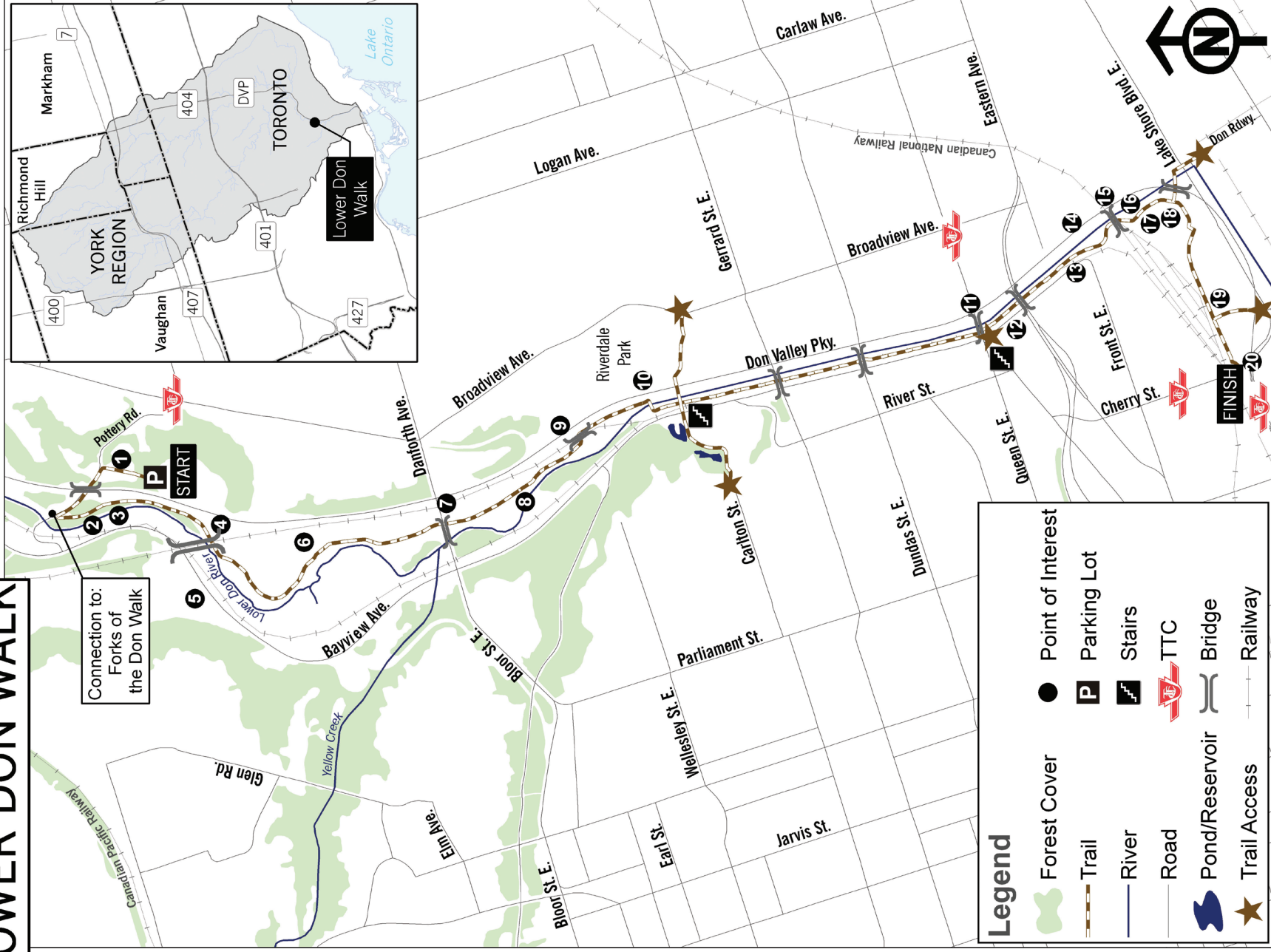
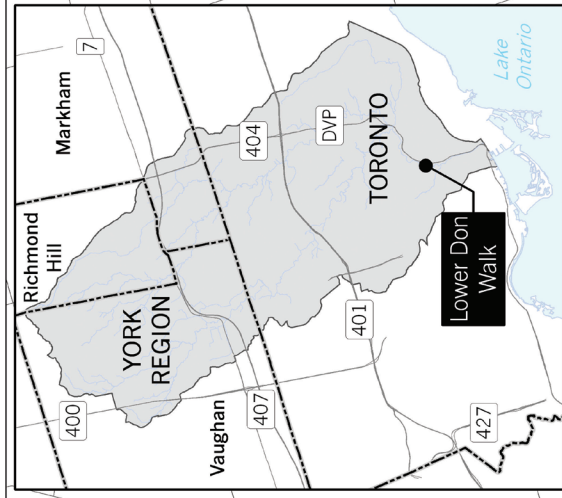
- Users of these trail guides are responsible for their own safety and well being.
- Be aware of cyclists and other trail users at all times.
- Walk with others.
- Keep your children in sight at all times.
- Trails may involve stairs and slopes.
- Trails may not be lit or cleared of ice and snow.
- Stay 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 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.trca.ca



LOWER DON WALK

Connection to:
Forks of
the Don Walk



Metres
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