

# Dundas Valley All-Falls Loop

## OVERVIEW

**T**he Dundas Valley Conservation Area is one of Southern Ontario's natural gems with 1,200ha of lush Carolinian forest, meadows and natural springs. The conservation area contains more than 40k of trails to choose from, but on this, my inaugural hike of this guide, I was determined to see all of the falls the area had to offer.

This route arcs across the conservation area, giving you a wonderful cross-section of its natural wonders and historical sites. Much of the route follows wide, smooth, shady paths, which are perfect for walking abreast and chatting with a friend. The trails in the conservation area are used for a variety of activities. I encountered hikers, cyclists, school groups and even horseback riders. Your first waterfall is small and lovely. After exploring the conservation area, you head out for some road walking that takes you to, you guessed it, 2 more waterfalls. You make a brief detour through a residential area in the community of Ancaster before looping back into the park for the fourth, and final, falls.

My goal may have been to visit all of the falls, but I found much more to enjoy on this varied and delightful hike.



## Insider Info

### LENGTH

8.4 kilometres

### LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY

Moderate



### LENGTH OF TIME

2.5 to 3.5 hours

**% ON ROAD** 15%

### HIGHLIGHTS

Sherman Falls, Mill Falls, Canterbury Falls, the Hermitage Cascade, Carolinian forest, the Hermitage Ruins

### PLACES TO EAT/DRINK

In Ancaster: Ancaster Mill, Caniche French Bakery/  
In Dundas: Detour Café, grupetto, Picone Fine Food (closed Sunday)/  
In the conservation area: the Trail Centre (July and August)

### ENTRANCE FEE

\$10.00/car

### TRAILHEAD

N43° 14.207' W79° 59.920'





*"Hiking gives me a healthy workout, fresh air and the ability to focus on the present. I come back healed and empowered by a sense of personal accomplishment."*

IVONKA KOSCIELNIAK



## Directions

1. Park in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area's Sulphur Springs Rd. lot. It's just east of where Sulphur Springs Rd. meets Mineral Springs Rd. There is a self-service pay station, which accepts cash and credit. Note that this is NOT the main entrance of the conservation area, so don't blindly go there. This is a back entrance.
2. As you enter the parking lot, you pass by a small stone building: the Hermitage Gatehouse Museum. After parking, take a path to the right of the building that leads to the Hermitage Cascade. This lovely little waterfall is a teaser for things to come.
3. Return to the parking lot. Pick up the Main Loop Tr., which is to the right of the large kiosk.
4. At the first intersection of trails, stay straight. At this point, the Main Loop Tr. joins the main Bruce Tr., so you will begin following its white blazes.
5. At the next intersection of trails, stay straight again, passing by the Headwaters Tr. The moss-covered rock formations here are a clear indication that you are on the Niagara Escarpment. Along this section of trail, there was a lot of garlic mustard, a hardy, edible, invasive plant that is wreaking havoc on forest ecosystems throughout Southern Ontario.
6. After approximately 150m, the trail comes to a T-intersection with a driveway. Turn right and follow the drive for about 90m, until you arrive at the Hermitage Ruins. George Gordon Browne Leith built this impressive stone mansion in 1855. Constructed of Dundas Valley red brick and Credit Valley limestone, the Hermitage was destroyed by fire in 1935. The Leiths' daughter had a smaller house built in the centre of the ruins and lived there until her death in 1942.



*A delight to find, the jack-in-the-pulpit is quite toxic and shouldn't be picked.*



7. After exploring the ruins, continue along the combined Main Loop Tr./Bruce Tr. with its white blazes. The trail goes to the left of the ruins and zigzags as it descends into a valley.
8. Cross the small bridge over smelly Sulphur Creek. This is an ecologically sensitive area, so please keep your dogs out of the stream in order to protect the aquatic ecosystem. If you look to the other side of Sulphur Springs Rd., there is a small fountain. It was once the site of the Sulphur Springs Hotel. In the late 1800s, the hotel operated a mineral spa that took advantage of the alleged healing powers associated with the water's high sulphur content.
9. The trail meanders through Carolinian forest bordered (in spring) by may-apples, trout lilies, trilliums, wild ginger and jack-in-the-pulpit. Carolinian forest is a lush, primarily deciduous, woodland ecosystem that is only found in the warmer regions of Southern Ontario, in line with and south of Lake Ontario. It supports species seldom found elsewhere in Canada. Sadly, the original forest is mostly gone, making this pocket extra precious. According to Environment and Climate Change Canada, it has been estimated that nearly 50% of Canada's species at risk occur in Ontario's Carolinian Zone.
10. At the next intersection of trails, keep right on the Main Loop Tr., leaving the main Bruce Tr. for a while. Alternatively, the trail to the left will lead you to the Trail Centre. Take some time to visit if you wish. There are washrooms, educational displays and a snack bar, which is open during



*In 1855, George Leith built an impressive mansion from local materials. Destroyed by fire in 1935, it's now known as the Hermitage Ruins.*



the summer. Washrooms are open year-round. If you take this detour, return to this trail intersection and turn left to continue following the Main Loop Tr.

11. Keep right at the intersection with the Sulphur Creek Tr. as well. I encountered a white-tailed deer here. She politely allowed me to take some photos before bounding off with a flick of her tail.
12. The trail descends to the creek again, where there are 3 lovely benches set along the shady riverbank. Cross the small bridge and enter a cool hemlock grove, then head uphill.
13. At the top of the hill, there is a covered bench pavilion and a 4-way intersection of trails. Stay straight to follow the Monarch Tr., passing by a magnificent white oak tree that is thought to be about 150 years old. At this point, the route merges with the main Bruce Tr. and its white blazes.
14. Follow the trail as it passes through a small meadow, which is dotted with shrubs and small trees. It continues along the top of a ridge overlooking the valley and creek. At the intersection with the Groundhog Hill Tr., turn right for a short detour to a beautiful lookout. Retrace your steps to this intersection and turn right.
15. Continue to follow the combined Monarch Tr./Bruce Tr. past the intersection with the Sulphur Creek Tr.
16. When you reach the top of a small hill, you'll see an outdoor chapel and the memorial for Archdeacon Holmes and his wife, who operated Camp Artaban on this land before it was purchased by Hamilton Conservation Authority.
17. Turn right at the next trail intersection. The trail then goes left as it widens into a small road. Go straight through a trail intersection with the Monarch Tr.
18. The trail arrives at a parking lot. Walk through it, and then turn right onto Artaban Rd., continuing to follow the main Bruce Tr.'s white blazes.
19. At the stop sign, turn left onto Lions Club Rd.
20. Watch for where the main Bruce Tr. turns right and enters the forest. (If you arrive at Old Dundas Rd. you've missed the turn, so go back.) You leave the road and follow the main Bruce Tr. for a visit to Sherman Falls. At 17m high, with a crest width of 8m, this is the most impressive of the 4 falls on this hike. Cross the bridge below the falls and continue on this little U-shaped trail until you arrive back at the road.
21. Turn right onto Old Dundas Rd. Here, you part ways with the main Bruce Tr. Old Dundas Rd. is a busy, twisty road, so walk along the left side facing traffic and be really careful.







*Can you spot her?*

22. Continue on Old Dundas Rd., as it takes you through a residential section of Ancaster and past the upscale Ancaster Mill. Built in 1863, this beautiful, old, stone flour mill is the last of 4 mills on this site. Fire destroyed the others. Currently, the mill houses a lovely and highly recommended restaurant. I was assured by its friendly staff that despite its fine dining feel, the dress code is casual and passing hikers are welcome to dine here. Even if you're not hungry, you're welcome to have a look around the property and to visit Mill Falls. Please respect other guests as the Ancaster Mill is a popular location for weddings and other events.
23. After your lunch or visit, continue past the mill and up the hill, following signs for the indoor chapel.
24. Directly across the road from the chapel and just past Ontario St. is the trailhead for the Heritage Tr. Take it and you're back in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area. Follow this lovely path for about 600m until you come to the Canterbury Falls Side Tr., a Bruce Tr. side trail that is marked with blue blazes.
25. Turn right onto the Canterbury Falls Side Tr., and follow it as it descends through what I think of as a "leany" forest.
26. At a T-intersection of trails, turn left and cross over a wooden bridge that passes over the top of Canterbury Falls, named for the nearby Canterbury Hills Camp.





*Sherman Falls is a favourite of artist E. Robert Ross, who painted it for the cover of this guidebook.*

27. Past the falls, the trail skirts the top of a moss-capped ridge.
28. Veer right at the next intersection of trails, where the Canterbury Falls Side Tr. and the Heritage Tr. merge.
29. Continue to follow the blue blazes until the Canterbury Falls Side Tr. ends. This is denoted by a single horizontal blue blaze atop a vertical one. Don't be tempted to follow some unmarked trails.
30. The Canterbury Falls Side Tr. ends at the Main Loop Tr. Turn left onto the Main Loop Tr., cross over a bridge and head uphill. You are in the home stretch now. As you descend, look for the Hermitage Cascade on your left.
31. Now head back up the hill, turn left and return to the parking lot and your car.

