

The Main Loop Trail Total Return Trip: 3.5 km

An Introductory Walk

For the first-time visitor to the Dundas Valley, this trail is an excellent place to begin. The Main Loop Trail is a journey through a mature deciduous forest, hemlock groves, stream valleys, the old apple orchard and open meadow. Hikers, cyclists and equestrians alike will enjoy this diverse trail.

Getting Started

From the Trail Centre, take the Main Loop Trail south across the Rail Trail and down the slope into the woods. A right turn will begin your discovery of the Dundas Valley!

Points of Interest

1. Sulphur Springs

The first point of interest is the historical Sulphur Springs fountain. As you near Sulphur Springs Road you may notice a hint of sulphur in the air. The Sulphur Springs fountain is located on the opposite side of the road. During the late 1800s, the Sulphur Springs Hotel with its mineral spa was a popular summertime destination. The sulphur waters were believed to have wondrous curative powers that attracted visitors from far and wide. The hotel closed in 1910 after two severe fires. The existing house "Deerspring", was built on the ruins and is now privately owned.

2. The Hermitage

Ruins are all that remain of the Hermitage, a once magnificent stone mansion that was built in 1855 by George Gordon Browne Leith. The stones used in construction were quarried from local sites; the red bricks from the Dundas Valley and the limestone sills from the Credit River Valley. Look closely at the stones of the ruins, and you may be able to find fossils of sea creatures and plant life. The last resident of the Hermitage was Mrs. Alma Dick Lauder, daughter of the Leiths. In 1934 the Hermitage was destroyed by fire. Mrs. Lauder built a small house within the ruins and continued to live there until her death in 1942.

3. Gatehouse Museum

The Gatehouse, built around the same time as the Hermitage, was once known as "The Lodge". It was originally the home of the gatekeeper and his family. The gatekeeper performed general duties and opened the gate for family and visitors to the Hermitage. Today, the building is the Gatehouse Museum, and houses the history of the Hermitage and the family who lived there. Behind the building, Ancaster Creek tumbles over the Hermitage Falls before winding its way through the valley. To make an appointment to visit the museum, or for a guided tour of the Hermitage ruins, please call 905-627-1233 or Fieldcote Museum at 905-648-8144.

4. Apple Orchard

The Merrick family planted this orchard more than 50 years ago. Many different types of apples could be found here, including Macintosh, Jonathan and Golden Delicious. Apple cider was once made in the cider shanty which still stands in the orchard. The area has now been left to regenerate naturally and is an ideal spot to watch for Eastern bluebird, Whitetailed deer, Red-tailed hawks, and Turkey vultures.

5. Old Oak Tree

At the bottom of the apple orchard is the intersection of the Monarch and Main Loop Trails. Towering overhead is a White Oak tree approximately 150 years old. Two benches have been placed beneath this magnificent tree, for visitors to relax and enjoy a quiet moment.

6. Hemlock Grove

As you make your way down the side of the valley towards the Hemlock grove, you may notice a series of terraces, each one reminiscent of an old stream bed. Hemlocks, with their short, flat needles, offer year round protection for small birds and animals such as Red Squirrels, Nuthatches, Chickadees & occasionally owls. Watch closely for the unusual tree which has been nicknamed "Watcher of the Woods". This tree, an American Beech, with smooth, grey bark gets its nick-name from the unusual markings on the trunk which resemble eyes.

7. Dundas Valley Trail Centre

The heart of the valley and the focal point of the trail system, the Dundas Valley Trail Centre is a beautiful reproduction of a Victorian train station. The Trail Centre offers interpretive displays, snack bar and gift shop, washrooms, and a picnic pavilion. It is open to the public on weekends and holidays from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the winter & 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. in the summer; and weekdays from 8:30 a.m. - 3 p.m. in the both the winter & the summer. Interpretive hikes, organized tours and school programs are available year round. For further information about these activities, please call 905-627-1233.

The Griffin House

An excellent example of Ancaster's early history is preserved in a simple 1.5-storey house just west of the Hermitage Ruins. The Griffin House was the home of Enefers Griffin, his wife Priscilla, their children and descendants. Born into slavery in Virginia, Enefers Griffin escaped to freedom in Canada in 1828-29. In 1834, the Griffins purchased the house with 50 acres of land and for the next 150 years their descendants farmed here. Archeologists have unearthed more than 3,000 artifacts on this small site including stoneware, porcelain, clay pipes and masonry. The home has been restored to the pre-1850 period as a site for interpreting Black-Canadian history. Group tours and themed hikes are organized by the HCA and Fieldcote Museum. The Griffin House is located just off Mineral Springs Road. For more information, call (905) 627-1233 or (905) 648-8144.

Thomas A. Beckett Living Forest

Each year, supporters of the Conservation Foundation Living Forest Fund are invited to help in the Thomas A. Beckett Forest. Many donors dedicate a tree to mark special achievements and to honour the lives of loved ones. Their donations have supported the maintenance of a trail and development of interpretive materials in the forest itself. The forest is named for Judge Thomas Beckett, a well-known conservationist and a founding member of HCA. Under his leadership, the HCA began a major lands acquisition program, which included lands in the Dundas Valley. The forest is located adjacent to the Governors Road parking area. To find out more about making a donation, please call 905-525-2181 ext. 112.

