



WATERLOO REGION'S ULTIMATE HIKING GUIDE

Tips and tricks for navigating local trails



Reconnect
Waterloo Region



Shade's Mills Conservation Area, flickr user jmcunnin2000

Welcome to **Reconnect Waterloo Region!**

In addition to curating local events and promoting community connection, **we've partnered with rare Charitable Research Reserve on this exclusive hiking guide**, which includes some of Waterloo Region's best trails, a beginner's guide to hiking etiquette, fun activities for all seasons, and useful apps to enhance your experience.

To learn more, check out ReconnectWaterloo.ca. You can use our interactive map to find fun (and mostly free!) events happening in Waterloo Region.

Even though I have walked some local trails hundreds of times, I always find myself noticing and appreciating new things. There's so much to love and explore (even if we have to share space with our infamous geese friends).



Let the adventure begin!

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What's

The rare Charitable Research Reserve?

The rare Charitable Research Reserve is a community-driven land trust and research institute protecting over 1,500 acres of ecologically significant lands across nine properties in Waterloo Region and Wellington County. They don't build fences around their natural areas because they see people as part of the environment. They provide a trail system open and free for the public, while protecting sensitive landscapes and research projects. *rare* also runs children's programs, turtle rescue, garden projects, and more and they selected the best trails in Waterloo Region for this guide.

If that sounds good to you, [sign up for the *rare* newsletter](#) or [download detailed educational trail guides from the *special walks* section of their website](#).



Enhance Your Hiking Experience with Apps

How can you bring your experience outdoors to life and connect more to the plants and animals around you?

Here are my recommendations for some great apps I always have ready for hikes:



Merlin Bird ID app

Hear a bird chirping or cawing and don't know who the sound belongs to? Pull out this app and record what you hear. The app will identify the birds around you and play sounds to learn about different communication patterns. It also offers a photo ID feature that scans your image and offers potential matches.



Geocache

Find hidden treasures along your walk by following clues in this app! You can also create a cache of your own to hide in your community. Most caches have a logbook that you can sign and see who else found it before you. They can be large and hidden in logs, or "micro" and disguised on park signs. Whichever you decide, geocaching is sure to add some adventurous fun to your next walk.



iNaturalist

Walking by a new plant or animal you haven't seen before? Upload a photo of it on this app, and you can contribute to citizen science by identifying it from a list of recommended species. Your observation will be confirmed by scientists and naturalists worldwide. A great way to support scientific data!



Avenza

Trail administrators use the app to share important information like closure notices and maps, which you can download ahead of your hike, so that internet isn't required when you're on the trails.



DID YOU KNOW: "Urban Sprawl" is a term that describes unrestricted housing and road development over large expanses of land. Sprawl is a major threat to farmland and biodiversity on trails and parks close to urban areas.

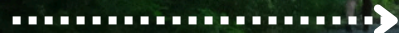
**STOP
DESTRUCTIVE
SPRAWL**

Our Trail Recommendations

Here are our top recommendations for trails to visit. Have you explored any of these before?

This guide was created with care by Environmental Defence Canada to help you explore and connect with nature. Hiking comes with inherent risks, so please assess your own abilities, prepare appropriately and make informed decisions on the trail. Environmental Defence Canada cannot be held liable for injuries, accidents or incidents that may occur while using this guide.

While we strive to provide accurate and current information, this guide may contain errors or omissions. Please also keep in mind that trail conditions can change due to weather, season and other factors, so always check local conditions before heading out.













Our Trail Recommendations













Photo: Brock Vegas on google maps

rare River Trail Loop

-  **Address:** North side of George St., just east of Blair Rd., Cambridge
-  **Trail Length:** 1.9 km
-  **Transit-accessible:** Yes
-  **Accessible trail(s):** Narrow, unpaved trail
-  **Parking:** Yes
-  **Bikes:** No
-  **Dogs:** No
-  **Features:** River views, natural area
-  **Open:** March 15 - November 15
-  **Cost:** Free

A narrow trail through a natural wooded area with a beautiful view of the Grand River. See the view from atop the limestone cliffs and see the junction of the Grand and Speed Rivers to the north.

rare Maple Lane/Thompson Tract loop

-  **Address:** 83 Langdon Dr, Cambridge
-  **Trail Length:** 2 km
-  **Transit-accessible:** Yes
-  **Accessible trail(s):** No
-  **Parking:** No
-  **Bikes:** Allowed, but bikes must be lifted over a fence
-  **Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
-  **Features:** Old growth forest, butterfly meadow
-  **Open:** Year-round
-  **Cost:** Free

Combining two routes, this hike passes through several distinct areas of **rare's** Thompson Tract, including an old growth forest and butterfly meadow.



Photo: rare Charitable Research Reserve

In Waterloo Region, we love our farmers and local produce! Unfortunately, **Ontario loses over 300 acres of precious farmland every day** and urban sprawl is one of the main causes.

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Our Trail Recommendations



Photo: Flickr User Steve Snyder

Huron Natural Area

- Address:** 801 Trillium Drive, Kitchener
- Trail Length:** Multiple route options, 2-5 km
- Transit-accessible:** Yes
- Accessible trail(s):** Easy route with some inclines and declines
- Parking:** Yes
- Bikes:** Yes
- Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
- Features:** Pond, wildlife, washrooms near entrance, info boards
- Open:** Year-round
- Cost:** Free

Huron Natural Area is home to more than 250 acres of protected forest and wetland. Plenty of birds to see and hear! Make sure to read the info boards to learn more about local wildlife.



Photo: Google Maps

Woolwich Reservoir trail loop

- Address:** 7224 Reids Wood Drive, northwest of Elmira
- Trail Length:** 7 km
- Transit-accessible:** No
- Accessible trail(s):** Flat, paved trail for part of the route, no washrooms/facilities
- Parking:** Yes
- Bikes:** Yes
- Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
- Features:** Reservoir, paved and unpaved trails
- Open:** Year-round
- Cost:** Free

This is the longest hike in our guide, but the route around the reservoir is lovely and peaceful. For a shorter route, simply walk to the reservoir and back. In bad weather, the unpaved portions can get muddy.



Did you know that climate change is making Ontario winters warmer and wetter? Unfortunately, this is good news for ticks. Be sure to do a “tick check” with your friends, family, and pets after you’ve enjoyed the great outdoors!













Our Trail Recommendations



Photo: Google Maps

Laurel Creek Conservation Area











-  **Address:** 625 Westmount Road North, Waterloo
-  **Trail Length:** Multiple routes
-  **Transit-accessible:** Yes
-  **Accessible trail(s):** Mix of paved and unpaved areas
-  **Parking:** Paid
-  **Bikes:** Yes
-  **Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
-  **Features:** Birding, camping, picnic sites, washrooms, canoeing, skiing, snowshoeing, swimming
-  **Open:** Year-round
-  **Cost:** \$4-\$9, based on age

This urban park has it all: areas for picnics, swimming, equipment rentals and some natural areas. Take it all in from the small lookout tower on the west side of the reservoir.



Photo: flickr user jmcunnin2000

Shade's Mills Conservation Area

-  **Address:** 450 Avenue Road, Cambridge
-  **Trail Length:** Multiple routes
-  **Transit-accessible:** Yes, with 10 minute walk
-  **Accessible trail(s):** Mix of paved and unpaved routes
-  **Parking:** Paid
-  **Bikes:** Yes
-  **Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
-  **Features:** Tall trees, picnic areas, washrooms, swimming
-  **Open:** Year-round
-  **Cost:** \$4-9 based on age

A large reservoir and beach, plus hardwood forest with trails and a beautiful creek. Choose your own adventure!



Waterloo Region is home to many wildlife species that depend on our forests and wetlands for survival. Urban sprawl threatens many of these plants and animals.

**STOP
DESTRUCTIVE
SPRAWL**

Our Trail Recommendations



Photo: Tina McAuley

Pinehurst Lake Conservation Area

- Address:** 468 Pinehurst Rd., Ayr
- Trail Length:** Multiple routes
- Transit-accessible:** No
- Accessible trail(s):** Mix of paved and unpaved routes
- Parking:** Paid
- Bikes:** Yes
- Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
- Features:** Swimming, picnic tables, forested areas, washrooms
- Open:** Year-round
- Cost:** \$4-9 based, on age

Mature Carolinian forest surrounding a kettle lake. Soak in the foliage or launch a canoe!



Photo: Google Map

Petersburg Crown Land Trail

- Address:** Queen St. south of Highway 7/8 across from Holst Towing, Wilmot
- Trail Length:** 2.7 km
- Transit-accessible:** No
- Accessible trail(s):** Some rugged areas, moderate difficulty
- Parking:** Free
- Bikes:** Yes
- Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
- Features:** Forested area, no waste baskets or paving.
- Open:** Year-round
- Cost:** Free

Excellent trails for hiking and cross-country skiing on Crown land in Wilmot.

Farmland helps maintain biodiversity in forested areas by creating corridors where wildlife can travel between natural areas.

The Wilmot Land Assembly is a major threat to farmland in Waterloo Region. Learn how Wilmot farmers are fighting back at: fightforfarmland.com













Our Trail Recommendations



Photo: Google Maps

Homer Watson Park Trail











-  **Address:** Multiple entrances, Homer Watson Blvd. or Wabanki Dr. near Manitou Dr., Kitchener
-  **Trail Length:** Multiple routes
-  **Transit-accessible:** Yes
-  **Accessible trail(s):** Gravel trail
-  **Parking:** Free
-  **Bikes:** Yes
-  **Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
-  **Features:** Interactive art tour, river views
-  **Open:** Year-round
-  **Cost:** Free

In addition to great river views, this trail can be augmented with a guided tour app about the Canadian landscape painter Homer Watson. Visit <https://www.homerwatson.on.ca/> to learn more.



Photo: Google Maps

Dryden Tract

-  **Address:** 1785 Alps Rd., Cambridge
-  **Trail Length:** Multiple routes
-  **Transit-accessible:** No
-  **Accessible trail(s):** Unpaved trails
-  **Parking:** Free
-  **Bikes:** Yes
-  **Dogs:** Yes, on-leash
-  **Features:** Birds, Forested Areas, Hills
-  **Open:** Year-round
-  **Cost:** Free

Part of the Paris-Galt Moraine, the Dryden Tract is a landscape of deciduous forests, hills, and valleys. An excellent place to enjoy fall colours!



WHAT IS A MORaine, EXACTLY? A moraine is a mass of rocky soil and debris left by ancient glaciers.

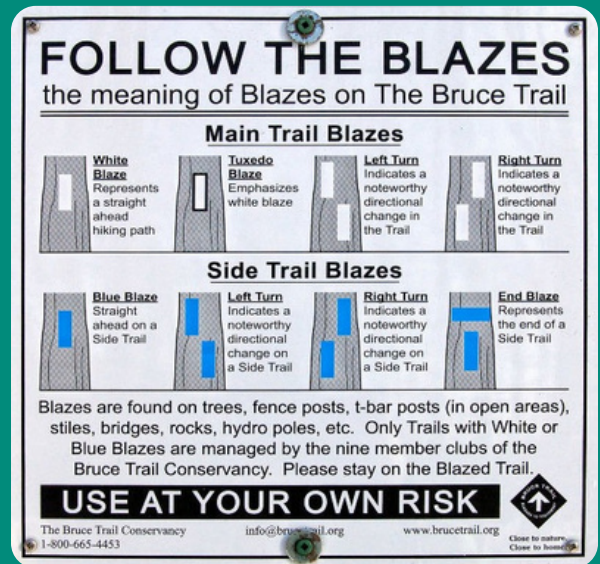
The Paris-Galt Moraine filters rain water and keeps ground water in the Grand River Watershed clean.

Hiking Etiquette

Did you know that there are *unspoken* rules to follow when hiking in nature? Following them ensures that you are respecting nature and other guests.

Here are my top tips:

- **Follow the trailblazes:** You may have noticed white or blue rectangles painted on tree trunks. These are important markers that will guide you to stay on the trail!
- **Respect wildlife:** Avoid disturbing wildlife. Observe from a distance and do not feed animals. Sticking to designated paths helps protect plants and ecosystems.
- **Keep your dog(s) out of trouble:** Clean up after your dog and always keep them on a leash. In sensitive areas, dogs are a bigger threat to conservation efforts than people are.
- **Leave what you find behind:** Do not pick plants, disturb wildlife, or remove rocks or artifacts. Leave natural and cultural features as you found them for others to enjoy.
- **Dispose of waste properly:** Pack out all trash, litter, and leftover food. Use designated waste disposal facilities or carry a trash bag to pack out your garbage.
- **Observe park signage:** Trail signs provide important information, including directions, distances, and points of interest.



What are the Animals Up To?

Hiking throughout the year allows you to witness and appreciate the changing seasons, from the vibrant colours of fall foliage to the quiet beauty of snow-covered landscapes.

Observing wildlife activity can also add a special dimension to your hiking experience in different seasons.

(Note: Safe and friendly wildlife interactions are done from far away. Please do not touch or feed any animals, as it puts their ability to survive in the wild at risk.)

Spring

- Many bird species migrate during spring. Look for flocks of birds travelling to their breeding grounds.
- Spring is a time when many animals, such as birds and mammals, engage in nesting behaviours. Keep an eye out for nests in trees and on the ground.
- Reptile activity: Warmer temperatures in spring may encourage reptiles, like snakes and salamanders, to become more active.

Summer

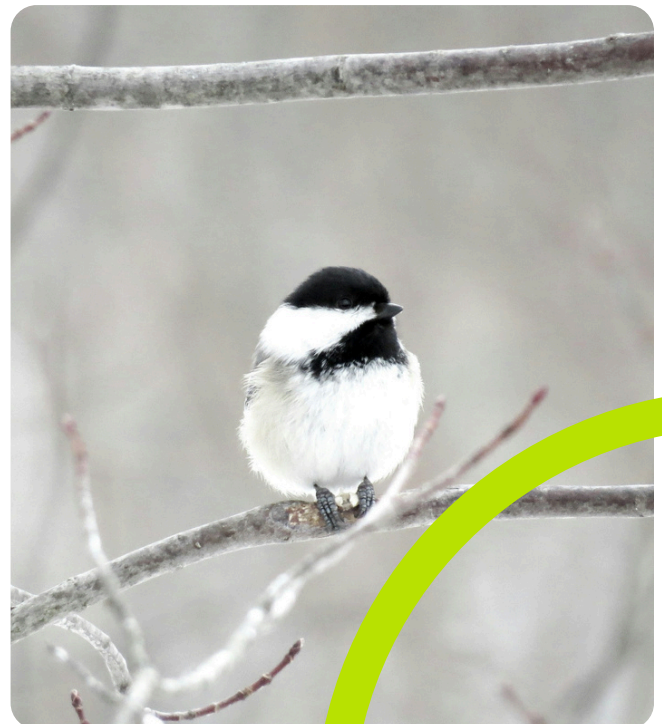
- Many bird species are actively vocalizing to attract mates or establish territories—listen to their songs!
- Summer is peak insect season. You may see butterflies, bees, and other pollinators, as well as spiders and other incredible insects.
- Some mammals give birth in summer, and you may come across some young animals.

Fall

- Prime time to view bird migrations, as they head south for the winter.
- Many animals start preparing for winter by foraging and storing food. For example, squirrels may be actively collecting and burying nuts.
- Of course, you can't miss the incredible changing colours of the tree canopy

Winter

- Snow provides an excellent canvas for tracking wildlife. Look for tracks of animals like deer, rabbits, foxes, mice, and birds.
- Some mammals, such as certain rodents, change their fur color in winter to blend in with the snowy surroundings—can you spot them?
- Many birds choose to stay right here in Ontario all winter long. Take some binoculars and have a look!



Hiking Bingo

Transform your hike into an engaging scavenger hunt, making every trail more exciting!

<p>SQUIRREL</p> 	<p>BIRD HOUSE</p> 	<p>GUST OF WIND</p> 	<p>POLLINATOR</p> 	<p>DOG WALKER</p> 
<p>MAPLE LEAF</p> 	<p>BIRDS NEST</p> 	<p>ANIMAL BURROW</p> 	<p>TRAIL MARKER</p> 	<p>PINE CONE</p> 
<p>CONIFEROUS TREE</p> 	<p>MUSHROOMS</p> 	<p>FREE SPACE</p>	<p>FLOCK OF BIRDS</p> 	<p>OAK LEAF</p> 
<p>ACORN</p> 	<p>BIRD HOUSE</p> 	<p>THE SUN</p> 	<p>HOLE IN TREE</p> 	<p>BERRIES</p> 
<p>ANIMAL TRACKS</p> 	<p>Y-SHAPED TWIG</p> 	<p>BIRD CALL</p> 	<p>RABBIT</p> 	<p>BIG ROCK</p> 



Before You Go... Here are My Quick Tips

- In warmer conditions, choose lightweight and breathable fabrics to stay cool. In colder weather, wear layers to trap and retain body heat. Also, make sure you're not so toasty that you sweat a lot - this can make you even colder in the long run!
- In conditions of low visibility, wearing bright or reflective clothing enhances your visibility to others, reducing the risk of accidents.
- Hiking boots help prevent slips and give great ankle support on rugged terrain.
- Protect yourself from UV rays all year round. Wearing sunscreen, a hat, and long sleeves helps prevent sunburns and long-term skin damage.
- Stay hydrated — take a reusable water bottle or a water bladder.
- Bring snacks to sustain your energy level throughout the hike.
- Check trail status: Some trails may be closed or have limited accessibility in winter. Check with local authorities or park services for trail conditions.
- Always check the time of sunset so you can plan when you should stop hiking and make your way back home.

Until Next Time

Waterloo Region is full of hidden gems, which I can't wait to uncover and share with you!

To see what I've found, check out our website and newsletter at ReconnectWaterloo.ca.

If you enjoyed this guide, you can send a photo of your trail experience or creative outdoor art and we might feature it in our next newsletter.

See you on the trails!

