

Gaspereau River Trail— A Winter Beauty

BY PETER WALLACE

Venturing out on a hike in winter with snow on the ground can be an exhilarating experience. One of the best trails for this is along the Gaspereau River. It is relatively flat and has the river in view most of the way. It is sheltered from the cold north winds, and is wide enough to easily chat with friends walking with you. It is beautiful, with attractive features for kids and adults alike. Many people take their dogs on this trail because there are no leash conditions, but if you have a dog, please be cognisant that lots of folks, especially children, are afraid of dogs. Only let well-behaved dogs off leash. The trail is four kilometres, a simple in-and-out return, and you can turn back at any time. One sensible turn around, if the conditions are slippery, is when it starts to narrow and cling to the river bank for the last half of a kilometre. The trail ends at a stream that enters from the north at a left bend (see yellow lines on satellite image). Beyond this point, the river bank becomes a cliff and cannot be negotiated without climbing and bushwhacking up to the top. As always, respect others, and pack out all that you pack in—especially dog poop.

Directions

The trail starts at the bridge over the Gaspereau River on Deep Hollow Road, a short distance down from the



An easy trail to follow in all seasons.

flashing light where Deep Hollow Road intersects the White Rock Road. There is a parking for two or three cars on the northwest side of the road, just before the bridge. The trailhead is just to the right at this point. In addition, there is a parking lot across the bridge for seven or eight cars on the southeast side of the road. It is well-used in all seasons, and is easy to follow.

From the southeast parking lot, you must cross the bridge to get to the trailhead. There is no sidewalk or shoulder. It is narrow and dangerous if cars, and especially trucks, are on the road. Walk facing traffic, and look drivers in the eye so they note your presence. Do not attempt to cross when large trucks are approaching. The road slopes down to the bridge from both directions, and large trucks cannot stop suddenly.



Ice blocks strewn along the river shore (above left), and small circular ice disks in the water (above right).

Trail Description

The most difficult and tricky section is the first 200 m. It goes along the water and onto stepping stones, or alternatively up and along the steep, slippery river bank. If the water is low, take the river route, because it is easier, but be wary of thin ice on the river's edge. It is this section that gives the trail a moderate rating.

It is hard to realize now, but the far bank here, just to the north of the bridge, was the site of a bustling saw mill in the 1890s (see photo at right). It was relocated elsewhere in 1904 because all of the accessible wood had been taken from the upper watershed.

After the difficult section, the trail continues as a wide, former, ox-cart trail, initially built in the early 1900s for an ill-fated attempt to install a power turbine upstream. The ox-cart portion at the start was destroyed by river erosion and building of the bridge.

There are so many neat surprises on this trail in the winter, whether it is snow sculptures, animal tracks, or ice structures.

From here, the trail gently edges along the river bank, including some short muddy sections that are often frozen in the winter. Eventually you come to evidence of the ox-cart trail, namely the dry-stone retaining wall, which keeps the trail high along the bank. This section crosses a few small side brooks, which have many picturesque icicles in winter. The trail then



The old mill, just above the bridge, was a bustling place in the 1890s. SOURCE: WHITEROCKHALL.EDNET.NS.CA/HISTORY.HTM

opens onto the river plain where there are abundant large hemlock and hardwood trees in a very open forest. In the understory, there are multitudes of low-lying ground-hemlock, or Canada yew, one of the best examples of these shrubs in Kings County. The trail is normally not cleared of fallen trees, especially the large ones, so go over or under them, which is great fun for children. The kids also enjoy watching the adults do the limbo, duck walk, or four-limbed crawl. After this large open area, the trail narrows, and winds its way up and along the north river bank past a right curve, and then a left curve, eventually ending at a small input stream. This last part is tricky and not advisable with children.

One of the beauties of the open area is that there are many fallen trees that you can sit on to contemplate your surroundings and have a snack or drink. The other cool thing is that if the river, or the adjacent swampy areas, are partially frozen, you can walk back part way off trail. This is fun for children. You may see distinctive high snow drifts along the north bank packed in by the winds. The cold temperatures can also freeze parts of the river, and then the melt causes the crustal ice to be thrust up by the current into high ridges or small circular ice disks (see photos at left). Neat surprises abound here in the winter, whether it is snow sculptures, animal tracks, or ice structures. Enjoy!

Peter Wallace is a retired geologist and leads a weekly hiking group of retirees to areas of natural beauty and interest in the region. Peter contributed the photos and map specifications.

