

Wambolt Falls: A Multi-Adventure Extravaganza

BY PETER WALLACE

Nictaux is a little-known area in the Valley, but offers one of the coolest adventures in the province. No high vistas, coastal shores, or natural spectacles; rather it is an intriguing human-built landscape. There is an amazing echo tunnel, a waterfall, and a great picnic and swim area, with lots to do in between. All ages will be amazed and amused. There are multiple access points depending on your group and your time frame. Make a day of it: visit the tunnel and falls in the morning, have lunch and a swim in the reservoir, and leave mid-afternoon. It makes for an unforgettable adventure.

Directions

Start anywhere along the Middleton–New Germany rail trail if you are biking, but beware of the long climb out of Nictaux. The rail trail joins up with the reservoir at the end of the climb (see map).

Alternatively, you can park where the Nictaux Canal crosses Highway 10 at Neily and Varner Mountain Roads. The parking area at the canal is small, but there is plenty of space on the two side roads within 200 m of the canal. From here, you can bike or hike along the flat trail that follows the canal for about 3 km to the reservoir. Alternatively, you can launch a kayak or canoe here and paddle the canal to the



A journey into darkness in the echo tunnel.

reservoir. Another option, the shortest route (800 m), is the NS Power entrance road and parking area, which is three kilometres further south on Highway 10, but do not park beyond or in front of the gate. From here, it's best to just walk to the reservoir. The best picnic and swimming area is one kilometre south from the dam along the rail trail, which follows the reservoir shore.

Trail Description

The bike trail up from Nictaux is a typical rail trail, but has been “repaired” using large round cobbles, so road bikes are not advisable. The trail that follows the canal from Neily Road is flat and easily biked or hiked. The canal has no barriers past this point to the reservoir, and the current is minimal, so paddling is easy. The NS Power road is an easy walk downhill to the reservoir from Highway 10, but it is rough in places.

The fun starts at the reservoir. You might begin by walking along the top of the dam to see how high it is above the original river valley and go along to the



The canal and accompanying trail (left) and the opening to the tunnel (right).

spillway to see how much water is going over it. To get to the echo tunnel, go down the gravel trail directly opposite the NS Power road where it crosses the canal road. You are going down the outside slope of the dam, and at the bottom it makes a tight J-curve to the left. From there you can see the tunnel entrance ahead. The tunnel is about two metres high and wide, and gently curves back into the darkness nearly 150 m—scary to those of such a mind. The echo from the start is amazing—hoot and whistle, stamp your feet. The returning echo seems louder than the original noise! The tunnel is quite dry and easily traveled, but you do need a light to see the end—not your cell phone, it's a large light -absorbing place. An unsubstantiated rumour is that the tunnel was built and used for the river flow while building the dam. Once the dam was finished, the tunnel was sealed on the up-stream end, allowing the reservoir to fill, but the down-stream end was left open in case it is needed in the future.

The falls is reached by a trail that starts where the canal and rail trail diverge. This is an old logging trail



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contouring around the hill. After less than fifty metres, the trail goes to the right, leaving the logging trail, and curves down the slope in a series of switchbacks to the river's edge. It is quite steep, and along the way a few well-placed trees can help you get down. The trail ends at the river's edge where you can see the falls. To get closer to the falls, you must travel the riverbed, which is full of very large moss-covered boulders, and you need to dodge puddles and running water. This is not recommended for children or wobbly adults.

The best picnic area is one kilometre south on the rail trail in a little clearing by the reservoir, with a few trees and a small beach. If you are going for a swim, beware of hazards, especially broken glass.

This is a disturbed area with burdock, wild lettuce, mullein, knap weed, hawkweed, and brambles in the open areas. Most trees are spruce and fir, no more than 50 years old, with even younger groupings of hardwood saplings. On a recent trip we observed a little brown bat at the end of the echo tunnel. If you spot one, take care not to disturb it, and report your sighting. We've also seen garter snakes sunning themselves on the rocky beach and frogs in the water.

This area provides a great adventure, is kid-friendly, and shows that human constructed landscapes can be as enjoyable as natural ones. Please tread lightly, take only photos and recordings, and carry out your waste.

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.