

Crosby Hiking Trails

A diverse all-seasons walk through contrasting softwood and hardwood forests.

BY PETER WALLACE

The Crosby Hiking Trails are a great example of contrasting spruce-pine (softwood, conifer) and maple-ash-aspens (hardwood, deciduous) forests and are supported and maintained by the local community. The trails are easy in that they are wide and simple to follow, and the contrasting forest types are obvious without needing guess work. You can take the easy way around to hike for an hour or extend it by taking the many alternative routes. It's a great place for a family hike due to the contrasting terrains (forest, brook, and field) and can be done any time of the year, but my favourite times are fall and winter. The trails are quite protected with relatively good footing and no steep slopes, which suits walking in the colder months. If there is adequate snow, the trails provide a nice cross-country ski or snowshoe.

Directions: The trails are in Coldbrook, adjacent to the Hayes Subdivision and the fish hatchery off highway 1, across from the Foodland grocery store. They are accessed by turning onto George Street immediately



Bridge over Spidle Brook.

opposite the Foodland and then making a quick right onto Wade Street. Go to the end of Wade Street for the trail head, where there is adequate parking and signage. As always, carry out what you pack in and keep pets on leads since many people with other pets and young children use the trail. You may also see the occasional horse and rider from the nearby Hobby Horse Farm, which you definitely don't want to startle!



Above left is the trail through the mature conifer forest; note needles and cones on the trail. Above right is the trail through the pioneer hardwood forest; note the smaller size of leaves on the ground and the small hardwood trees.

Description: The main trail starts with a bridge over Spidle Brook, a clear stream with a sandy bottom. This brook is the source of water for the fish hatchery so don't muck it up, but do look at the frogs and plants that inhabit the banks. Once past the brook, there are multiple pathways and loops through the forest with some going out to Spittal Road, which is gravel, and/or along the fields. Keep off the fields during

the growing season, especially along the west side of the south-east field (see the map below). Take the parallel trail in the woods.

Once the trail crosses the bridge, it passes through a softwood forest with tall, majestic spruce and pine trees, a mature planted forest that has been well maintained. Note there is very little understory to the trees because their canopy is so thick that little light gets to the forest floor. From midsummer to fall, this encourages multiple kinds of fungi to pop out of the needle encrusted soil, which also gives soft and quiet footsteps. There are small areas or groupings of seedlings plus some of the usual understory bushes like Canada yew (*Taxus canadensis*), northern bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*), bunchberry (*Cornus canadensis*), etc.

The forested area to the south is a sharply contrasted younger and pioneer hardwood forest, except along



The trail beside Spidle Brook to the south showing the mature hardwood forest; note the abundant leaf litter and the larger hardwood trees.

Spidle Brook at the extreme south, where some more mature maples in excess of 40 cm in diameter are found. Parts of the trail leading to this area are very muddy, but the mud is easy to walk around and is well worth the vista into the brook ravine with its mature trees. The understory is markedly different here, containing abundant ferns, herbaceous flowers, and different species of fungi, lichens, and shrubs—a whole different set of observations! In autumn, the fallen leaves are thick along the trails here and make for a delightful and noisy rustling walk.

The Crosby Trails are everything a family would want for an outing: variable distances, flat easy trails for the young and very old, brook crossings with water for adventurous children, a wide variety of forest species, and possibly a close encounter with riders on horses. Surprises are around every corner!

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 map and photos.



Map of the Crosby Trails. There are two separate parallel trails to the left (west) of the "field," one in forest and the other along the edge of field.