

# Hiking the Hollow Bridge Canal

A spectacular walk along a canal that passes an old homestead.

BY PETER WALLACE

The Gaspereau hydro system, built in the '40s, provides an interesting hike where one can walk along a canal-side dyke for the first half before shifting into a mature spruce forest at the end (see map on next page). The trail passes by an old homestead before it ends in a small gravel pit next to West Davidson Street near Lumsden Pond. Just a few metres down the road is a cute, small, picnic area on the pond where you can have a rest before turning around to go back—unless you have a vehicle waiting. It is a bit more than 7.5 kilometres counting the return trip. There are a few puddles in the spruce forest depending on the season, but nothing that will give you much trouble to get around.

The whole trail is on private land; the canal and the gravel pit are owned by Nova Scotia Power, and the old homestead land is held by a private individual. The trail is a well-used ATV road that connects Black River Lake to the Lumsden Pond area, so respect their use. As always, respect the land by packing out all your waste and keep dogs under control.

## Directions

I usually start this trail at Black River Lake where the Hollow Bridge Canal passes under Deep Hollow Road,

and then return on the same route, but it can be done in reverse. There are lots of places to park near the bridge whereas parking is on the side of West Davidson Street, which is a little more dangerous. The first two kilometres are flat and easy. After that, the trail descends a wide brook valley and then goes up and over a shallow sloped hill to West Davidson Street, which takes a moderate effort. It is well worth it because there are lots to see and hear along the way. If starting from the pond and doing the hike in reverse, the trail begins at the western end of the gravel pit, almost immediately after the gate. It is the trail that goes up a gravel slope on the right. Take the right fork.

## Description

The first 2 kilometres is along the dyke by the canal with the water constantly at your side. There is plenty of evidence of beavers and other animals moving between the forest and the water. This whole section has native and feral wildflowers, shrubs, and the occasional small tree—some chewed by the beavers. The forest edge is right next to the trail on the other side so birds can be seen and heard along with the occasional small critter. The end of this section near the Hollow Bridge hydro station is the only place I



Trail on the canal dyke—the canal is the dark area on the right.



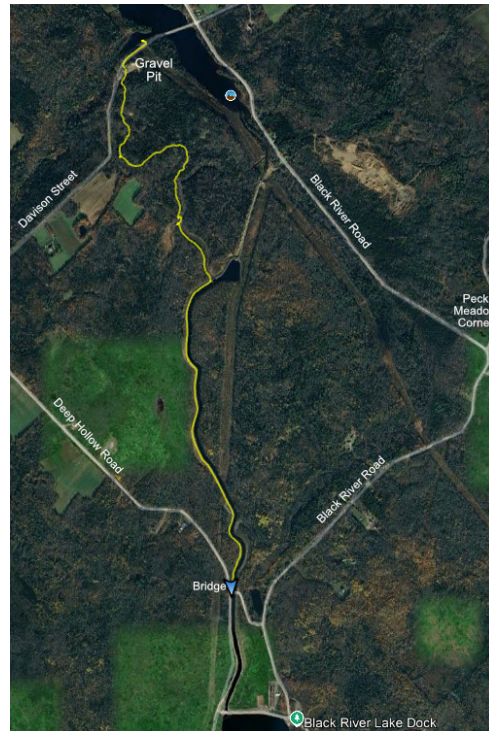
The tranquil water of the Hollow Bridge Canal

have seen and smelled American groundnut (*Apios americana*); don't let anyone tell you the fragrance is sweet, but it is definitely distinctive and never to be forgotten!

After leaving the canal, the trail goes down to a stream crossing. The stream drains a beaver "meadow"; see if you can find the breached beaver dam and have a look at the plants in the meadow. Beaver meadows make excellent fields because of the lack of sizable trees. They are also flat with excellent soil, good drainage, and a water source for irrigation.

After the stream, the trail winds up a hill into the spruce forest. Here there is less light, more moisture, and more ground vegetation. This means there are many interesting things to see—from plants to fungi and lichen, to bugs and animal life. This is one of the few areas I've glimpsed a black bear on a hike.

One of the highlights is the old homestead near the end. It is foreshadowed by numerous old apple trees along the trail, and then by a stash of arched 2 cm diameter steel rods. These were most probably the hoops that kept silo staves tight and weather proof. There are also some old rotting boards around that might have been the staves. Still farther on is a square depression in the ground, most likely the basement of the homestead house. Interestingly, there is a section of power line that ends here. This means the homestead was probably abandoned less than 100 years ago, though on first glance it appears older. The trail soon ends at the gravel pit beside West Davidson Street. If you go down West Davidson a short distance to where



Hollow Bridge Canal Trail. SOURCE: GOOGLE.COM.

the guard rails split, there is a great little picnic spot on the left, which is part of Lumsden Pond.

This hike is great in any season given the variety of ecosystems. It's fun to do with others, especially children who discover all sorts of things. Plan to do the trek at different times of year and see how it changes. A true nature walk!

**Peter Wallace is a retired geologist and leads a weekly hiking group in the region. Peter contributed the map and photos.**



Pile of 2 cm hoop rods from the silo near the old homestead



American groundnut (*Apios americana*)