

Little River Falls—A Not-So-Little Waterfall

A short, enjoyable walk in winter or spring with a big reward at the end.

BY PETER WALLACE

West of Sunken Lake is an abandoned county road, also known as the Nictaux Road, which leads to a small, but spectacular waterfall. The Nictaux Road was likely a trail originally used by Mi'kmaq for innumerable generations dating back long before colonization. Settlers started road construction on the trail in the late 18th century to enable a shorter route between Annapolis Royal and Halifax relative to the “highway” through the centre of the Annapolis Valley. Unfortunately, it was never finished and some of the abandoned sections have been lost in the last 225 years. From the road, a small forest trail departs on the right and heads to the falls. This small trail parallels the Little River, which drains Little River Lake and Trout River Pond. The river was dammed as part of the Gaspereau Lake–Lumsden Pond hydro system in the mid-20th century. This dam means that there is less water in the falls in dry summers, so the best time to view the falls is in late winter or early spring. The small forest trail is on private land, so respect the owner by packing out all your waste and keep all dogs under control.

Directions

This is an in-out route that starts at the junction of the Sunken Lake Road with the Nictaux Road (see map). The road is not drivable so park on the Sunken Lake Road, taking care not to block other vehicles; there are nearby logging operations, and many trucks/ATVs use this to access the area for recreation and logging activities. There is no street sign so do not confuse this with the nearby Little River Lake Road, which has cottages—there are no cottages on the Nictaux Road.

Start walking down the Nictaux Road, which forks 100 m from the start. Stay straight (right) at this fork. After another 1.1 km, the road gently curves to the left. The forest trail starts 60 m past the curve on the right side. It is usually flagged and the opening of the trail into the conifer trees is quite obvious. The trail weaves and winds through the woods for over 300 m to a rocky promontory overlooking the falls. This first view is from a cliff edge partially obscured by trees; be careful. For the adventuresome, the trail continues and winds its way down a very steep slope to the river for a better view of the falls and gully. Other users have put a rope down the steep section to assist the descent and ascent; use it at your own risk. The trail ends here though the Gaspereau River is only 200 m to the north, but it is very rough going to get to it.

Description

The land on the right of the straight section of the Nictaux Road was clear cut over 15 years ago and is now composed of shrubs and small trees such as red maple, ash, alder, etc. After the curve, there is an



Little River Falls



The Nictaux Road near the curve where it is a bit muddy.

abrupt change in the forest to larger trees, a mix of softwood and hardwood, as there has been no recent forestry activity there. On the left, just after you pass the initial fork, is second-growth forest of intermediate-aged trees, which is currently being selectively logged. Sections of the road near the curve are quite wet at times but are safely passed by walking the road edges.

The small trail through the forest curves around large trees and over boulders and hummocks. Some of these features are very picturesque in any season. Listen to the stream water to the west that gets louder as you approach the falls. It makes getting to the falls very climactic. The treeless (rocky) promontory overlooking the falls is quite large and flat with a very sharp and dangerous edge. According to local lore this waterfall is the centre of the world. A signpost in the clearing gives distances to other notable places far

away, one being to the bottom of the falls in case you wonder how far you will fall if you go over the cliff! (82 m by GPS, but the sign says 200 m just to impress the kids).

Climbing down on the trail to the bottom of the falls is worth it for the view. The water comes out of a notch falling into a pool at the bottom. The pool is formed from rocks and debris that hold the water back, but is also helped by tree trunks that have washed down the stream and over the falls. This debris in the water course and the thick vegetation along the riverbanks make it difficult to continue down to the Gaspereau River.



Signpost to other important places in the world.

It is a short hike but makes for a relatively easy and nice afternoon trek for everyone, including children and dogs.



Map of the road and trail to Little River Falls. SOURCE: GOOGLE MAPS.

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