

Walk the Don

LOWER BARTLEY SMITH GREENWAY (Langstaff Road to Steeles Avenue West)

This walk follows the Upper West Don in the City of Vaughan southwards from Langstaff Road (east of Keele Street) to Steeles Avenue West (west of Dufferin Street). The route follows the southern portion of the Bartley Smith Greenway (BSG), an as-yet incomplete trail system through the centre of Vaughan from Teston Road down to Steeles Avenue West. Note that the start of this walk is at a fenced seasonal sports field, which may be closed off during the winter months.

 **Public transit: Getting there;** From Downsview station, take TTC bus route 107B Keele North to the Langstaff Road or Planchet Road stops (extra fare required north of Steeles Avenue). Cross Langstaff Road by the pedestrian crossing at Planchet Road and walk 100 metres east along the soft shoulder to the sports field parking lot. This location is not served by York Region Transit.

Getting home; The walk ends near Dufferin Street and Steeles Avenue West, which is served by three routes: TTC route 60 Steeles West to Yonge/Finch subway station, TTC route 105 Dufferin North to Downsview Station, and YRT routes 3/3B Thornhill-York University.

* Public transit routes and schedules are subject to change. Please check with provider. TTC Information: www.ttc.ca or 416-393-4636. YRT Information: www.yrt.ca or 1-866-668-3978.

 **Parking:** Ample parking is available in the sports field parking lot.

 **Level of difficulty:** Easy – stroller accessible. There are a few short steep grades and some soft gravel patches.

 **Approximate time:** One-and-a half to two hours.

 **Distance:** 6.5 kilometres

Two main environments are experienced in this walk. From Langstaff Road to Highway 7, the trail encompasses Langstaff EcoPark, a regenerating natural area along the river valley flanked on either side by industrial development. Here the trail surface is generally packed crushed limestone, with some soft gravel patches and stretches of asphalt. South of Glen Shields Avenue, the route passes through Marita Payne Park, one of Vaughan's most beautiful city parks set in an established residential area. This section is hard-paved throughout. Except for a short stretch near the southern end and one other street crossing, this walk is completely off-road.

 **1** The starting point is the municipal sports field parking lot on the south side of Langstaff Road west of the CN railway tracks and east of Keele Street. There is a seasonal portable toilet at this location. **[If access to this sports field is closed, the walk can be started at point number four, immediately east of the railway tracks.]**

 **2** Just west of the soccer field parking lot, in a separate tree-covered park, is a **pioneer cemetery** dating from the founding of the German Episcopal St. Stephen's Church in 1833. The memorial from 1965 incorporates a number of the original tombstones. The park is fenced off and entrance is available only from Langstaff Road. **[There is a soft shoulder but no sidewalk**

along Langstaff Road.] Return to the parking lot to access the BSG trail at the south-west corner. After a few metres, there is a junction. The right fork extends westwards for 250 metres to a gate at Langstaff Road.

 **3** Turn left to continue into **Langstaff EcoPark**. This park was officially opened in June 1997 and is the most significant natural regeneration area in the Upper West Don subwatershed, despite being surrounded by the Langstaff industrial-commercial district. The EcoPark is the result of a visionary partnership between Toronto and Region Conservation (TRCA), the City of Vaughan, members of the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce and the Vaughan Rotary Club. Over 10,000 trees, shrubs and aquatic plants have been planted and over 100 bird boxes installed in the river valley since 1992. These initiatives have dramatically enhanced rolling upland and lowland meadow habitats, and created new wetlands to help stabilize the watercourse and improve water quality downstream. Depending on the season and time of day, it is possible to catch sight of coyotes, foxes, beavers, mink, snakes, turtles, frogs and many species of birds. During late spring through fall the meadows are also alive with butterflies, bees, dragonflies and other insects, and full of colour from wildflowers and flowering shrubs. The course of the West Don River is dominated by large, mature trees, particularly Black Willows, Black

Walnuts and Sugar Maples that help block out the view of the industrial buildings on the surrounding table lands. The four-storey birdhouse situated at 100 metres from the trail junction is intended for Purple Martins, which nest in colonies.

At the far end of the playing field, a long-term sewer construction project currently interrupts the trail. For now, return to the parking lot and follow the north edge of the sports field along Langstaff Road. Cross the CN tracks with care and immediately turn right. This line is also used by the Go Transit service to Barrie, which was reinstated in 2008.

4 Adjacent to the railway crossing is a **memorial plaque** to Attilio de Gasperis, patriarch of a well-known Vaughan land development family, who used to farm in this area and whose valley lands are now part of Langstaff EcoPark. The trail descends southwards into the valley, crosses the river and enters a broad floodplain where the Vaughan Chamber of Commerce held an annual tree planting event for several years. Natural infiltration of willow trees is now also very evident. In the spring, the many nesting boxes installed in this area are mostly occupied by tree swallows. From here, the trail climbs briefly into the upland meadow adjacent to the CN line, bringing some of the surrounding industrial landscape into the line of sight, before descending to cross the West Don River again. Several

interpretive signs have been installed in this stretch.

5 About 150 metres beyond the bridge, the trail passes between two **stormwater water retention ponds**. These can hold millions of litres of water and provide treatment for stormwater runoff from over 90 hectares of adjacent industrial land to the north. These ponds have now become fully naturalized, the wetlands providing additional water filtration and habitat for waterfowl and other wetland bird species such as Red-winged Blackbirds. A weir on the far side of the larger pond to the right connects with the river.

6 Turn right at the fork in the trail 150 metres beyond the water retention ponds; the left fork leads out of the park to Audia Court (another convenient parking location). You are now entering **Keffer Marsh**, an engineered wetland complex that is the highlight of Langstaff EcoPark. This two-hectare project, named for an early settler who farmed this part of Vaughan Township in the early 1800s, comprises the marsh itself and a larger deciduous swamp, believed to be the largest constructed area of its kind in Ontario. Water is supplied from the east through Westminster Creek, a tributary of the West Don River that was diverted from its original southwards course in the 1970s to accommodate local development. Westminster Creek used to flow into the main branch of the West Don River south of

Steeles Avenue in G. Ross Lord Park. The residual stream, locally called Fisherville Creek, still exists south of Highway 407, and largely serves to drain stormwater ponds collecting runoff from the highway and surrounding area.

Base flow at Keffer Marsh is directed into a settling pond, through cattail thickets and into the marsh, then through a porous rock weir into the West Don River. This design serves to maximize water quality improvements and diversify wetland habitat. The much greater volumes of water generated during major rain storms are diverted into the deciduous swamp, designed to hold 10 million litres of water over a 24-hour period. Here the sediments settle out and cleaner water seeps back into the watercourse. The swamp is expected to fill with water about four times a year.

7 The various features of the Keffer Marsh complex can be observed from three bridges on the trail and an observation platform immediately south of the marsh. A number of interpretive signs have been installed along this section. At the junction beyond the third bridge, take the left-hand fork to look at the **water control structure**. From this point, retrace your steps, then stop at the observation deck for a view over the marsh. Proceed up the incline and cross Rivermede Road with caution. The river flows under the road through a box culvert.

8 South of Rivermede Road, the valley narrows and for 200 metres the trail passes through riparian shrubs and trees such as Black Walnut and Black Willow before climbing into an upland meadow adjacent to North Rivermede Road. The trail then unexpectedly enters a dense mature **upland mixed forest** remnant of mostly maple, walnut trees and pine trees, where for about 100 metres meadow flowers give way to woodland flowers including the invasive Garlic Mustard. The sudden change in air temperature on entering this forest patch on a hot sunny day is striking.

Beyond the forest, you can bear left at the fork to leave the trail for a refreshment break at the small plaza at Highway 7 and North Rivermede Road.

9 Continue by taking the trail that descends southwards into the river valley, noting the large stands of Staghorn Sumac on the left. The route soon passes under **Highway 7** alongside the river. Directly after the underpass, the embankments seen on either side of the river mark the position of a previous bridge over the West Don along the old alignment of Centre Street before Highway 407 was constructed. At the top of the embankment to the left, a 50-metre section of the old roadway is now used for gravel storage. The trail curves to the right as it continues between the river and Highway 407. Just beyond

the 407 underpass, bear right at the trail fork. The left trail is private and leads along the hydro corridor for 800 metres to Centre Street. The main trail at this point passes through a broad lowland meadow, but the valley narrows as it enters the Glen Shields residential area.

10 After passing under Glen Shields Avenue, the trail enters **Marita Payne Park**, named for the Canadian sprinter who won two silver medals in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics. The floodplain of the West Don now occupied by the park was reserved as open space following the devastation of Hurricane Hazel in 1954, while the surrounding lands were still mostly rural. The park was constructed in its present form when the area was developed for residential purposes in the early 1980s. It offers typical city park amenities and features, such as grassy areas, sports fields and children's playgrounds. However the park is well-endowed with mature shade trees, including Black Willow, Weeping Willow, poplar, Black Walnut and maple, and wildlife remains abundant. One local resident, whose garden backs onto the park, has observed over 140 species of birds in Marita Payne Park, as well as deer, beaver, otter, mink, fox and even opossum. The main path curves clockwise around the large 'duck pond' (actually another storm water retention pond). You will encounter four side trails along the route which lead to residential streets. Stay on the main path, which skirts to the left of a baseball diamond. A portable toilet

is accessible in the park area, however it is only available seasonally.

11 Close to Dufferin Street, the main trail does an abrupt right turn and crosses the bridge over the river to exit the park at **Glen Shields Avenue**. The culvert under the road leads to further trails through Glen Shields Park to the west. To reach the Dufferin Street and Steeles Avenue West intersection with restaurants, public transit and other amenities, turn left on Glen Shields Avenue, right on Dufferin Street and walk south for 600 metres.

12 However, the trail continues on the east side of Dufferin Street. Cross at the Glen Shields Ave. lights and pick up the trail entrance just south of the CN railway bridge. Although it is close to major streets, this is a quiet, heavily forested and little used stretch of the Greenway. However, much of the trail, which crosses the river twice, is in the valley floor and subject to flooding. This section can be hazardous during wet weather. The meadow area close to Steeles Avenue was planted in the 1990s and is becoming a healthy-looking successional forest of oak, ash and maple trees. A sign facing Steeles Avenue announces the Bartley Smith Greenway. Turn right and walk west along Steeles Avenue West for 200 metres to reach Dufferin Street again.

13 To continue further along the West Don River, the City of Toronto's **G. Ross Lord Park** on the

south side offers an excellent system of trails. To access these trails, cross Steeles Avenue at Dufferin Street and

return eastwards on the south side for 230 metres.

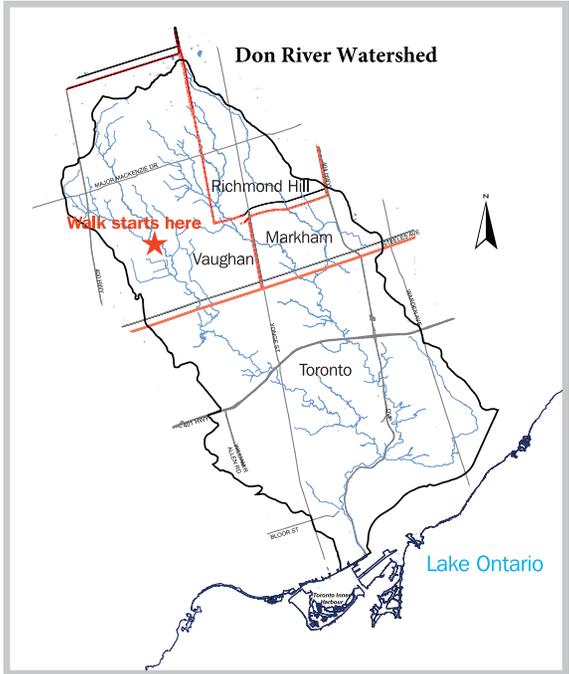
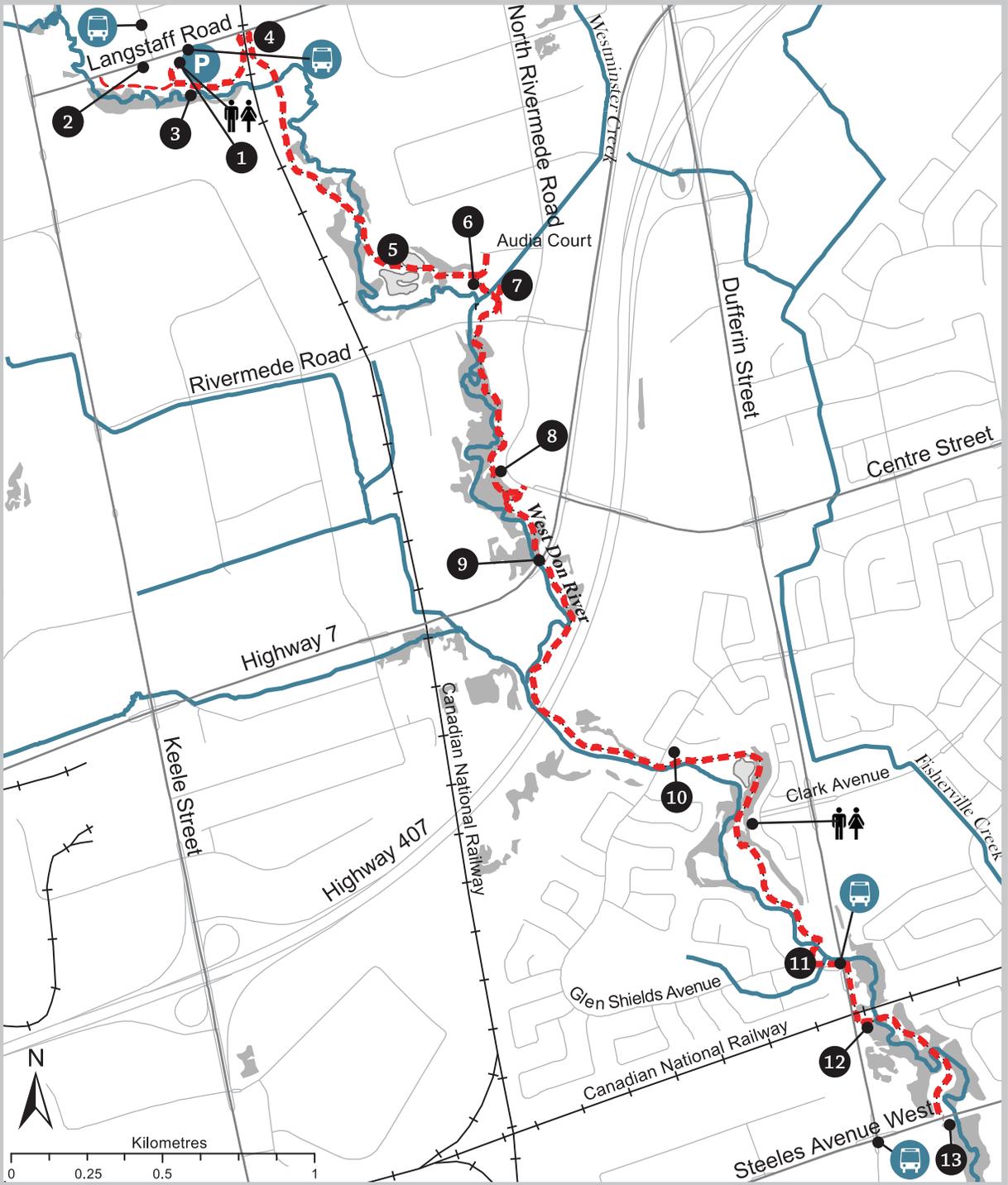
Trail Users' Guide

- Users of these trail guides are responsible for their own safety and well being.
- Cyclists: Yield to pedestrians.
- Walkers: Be aware of cyclists.
- Walk with others.
- Keep your children in sight at all times.
- Wear clothing to suit the weather and protect against insects.
- Wear footwear for hard pavement, loose or broken surfaces and bare earth.
- Carry drinking water.
- Protect against sun with dark glasses, hat and sunscreen.
- Stay on the trails or mown areas; do not leave them at any time.
- Keep your dog on a leash.
- Stoop and scoop after your dog.
- Do not pick or damage any vegetation.
- Beware of Poison Ivy: "Leaflets of three, let it be."
- Do not feed the wildlife.
- Do not light fires.
- Leave nothing behind.
- Washrooms operate seasonally.
- All walks involve stairs and slopes.
- Trails are not lit or cleared of ice and snow.
- Avoid the trails during and after a significant storm; water levels can rise suddenly.
- Cross roads only at intersections, lights or crosswalks.

For more walks in the Don River watershed, visit www.trca.on.ca/walkthedon



LOWER BARTLEY SMITH GREENWAY



Legend

- Trail - - - -
- Key trail points ●
- Bus stop
- Parking
- Watercourse —
- Forest cover
- Washrooms