

Steeltown's Other Side

Written & photographed by Paul Shaker except where noted.

For a city whose image is so linked with gritty industrial landscapes, it may come as a surprise to many that Hamilton's biggest defining feature is actually a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve.

The UNESCO-designated Niagara Escarpment, or "mountain" as it's known locally, winds its way through the city offering locals and visitors alike, amazing views of the community. It is part of daily life for thousands of Hamiltonians as the morning commute involves walking, driving, or cycling up and down the Escarpment. It also provides the basis for incredible waterfalls that are within walking distance of most Hamiltonians. A short hike from many residential neighbourhoods will take you



▲ Tiffany Falls is a popular destination for ice climbers who can be watched from a viewing deck. PHOTO BY DEREK PURDY.



▲ Geotrail worked with Tourism Hamilton and Royal Botanical Gardens to map Hamilton-area trails and waterfall hikes.



▲ The Geotrail online map website can go with you on a mobile device.





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▲ Special equipment lets climbers walk up the frozen Tiffany Falls. PHOTO BY DEREK PURDY.



▲ Dundas Peak gives a view of Cootes Paradise, Lake Ontario and downtown Hamilton.

Webster's Falls can be viewed from the top or from a trail that goes to the bottom of the falls. Trails can be icy in winter. ▼

Spectacular year-round, Tews Falls is the tallest waterfall in the Hamilton area. ▶



to numerous waterfalls, some hidden and some spectacularly on display for all to see. The Escarpment also shapes the terrain of the Royal

Botanical Gardens which, in addition to the famous garden areas, has 27 km of trails that weave in and around the Escarpment's waterfalls.

Interestingly, there is a historical link between the industrial heritage of the region and the Niagara Escarpment and the two intersect more than once

in the history of Hamilton's waterfalls. Many of the more-than 100 waterfalls in the Hamilton area are easily accessible to

the public and there are a few walks in particular that make for a great day's hike. Adventurers can grab a trail map or for the more tech-

savvy, the local tourism agency uses the web-tool Geotrail.ca to show visitors how to get outside and enjoy some of the best waterfalls hikes in the

area. Here are a few hikes that will take you to the best views in the region.

▲ The beautiful ribbon waterfall Sherman Falls was named after the founder of the Hamilton steel company DOFASCO.

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Webster's Falls and Gorge Walk

This is a popular weekend waterfall outing. On this hike you will see three amazing waterfalls and one heck of a view from the Niagara Escarpment. Starting at Cascades Park in Dundas, this hike takes you up the Escarpment passing Sydenham Falls where you will eventually come to Dundas Peak, an outcropping with a view second to none. Catch your breath, take a break and a photograph.

Looking east you will see Cootes Paradise, the westernmost part of Lake Ontario and even further in the distance, the skyline of downtown Hamilton. Continuing along the trail, you will come to Tews Falls, the tallest waterfall in the Hamilton region with a drop of over 40 metres. With the spring runoff, this waterfall is in its prime, although it's impressive year-round.

Moving even further west, you come to one of the most famous falls in the region, Webster's Falls, named for the Webster family who purchased the surrounding lands in 1819. Take in the view, or for the more adventurous, hike down to the bottom of the falls. Webster's Falls is captured on countless postcards and has been the most frequently visited waterfall in Hamilton for more than a century and has even appeared in a few Hollywood movies.

In total, a round trip on this hike will take you about three hours and the walk back is considerably easier as you are mostly going downhill.

Ancaster Village Waterfall Walk

Another great adventure is on the south-facing part of the Niagara Escarpment. Starting at Tiffany Falls Conservation Area, the first stop is the immediate namesake of the area, Tiffany Falls. The trek to the falls is a winding path up a ravine, over bridges until

you eventually reach the falls which presents itself like a hidden geological treasure found in an Indiana Jones movie. There is a viewing deck for the falls and if you venture there in the winter, you might catch a group of ice climbers working their way to the top.

Further west, you find an equally enchanting site, Sherman Falls, named after the Sherman family, former landowner and 1912 founder of the Dominion Foundry and Steel Company (DOFASCO). Sherman Falls is a 17-metre ribbon waterfall that is visible year round. At this point you can head back, or loop around to the Ancaster Old Mill Inn and take a break to have some refreshment while enjoying the Mill Falls and Lower Mill Falls. In total, you are looking at about a two-hour outing.

These hikes offer just a glimpse of the beauty of the Niagara Escarpment in the Hamilton region. In order to promote Steeltown's other side, the Royal Botanical Gardens and Tourism Hamilton partnered with Geotrail, an Ontario-based outdoor mapping company, to bring the local trail networks and waterfalls hikes to the growing online map that showcases more-than 1,000 trails. With a few clicks of a mouse you can browse through a variety of trails in the Hamilton region, and take a closer look at 10 waterfall hikes with photos and additional information. Once you find a hike that interests you, you can print out a map or take the map with you on a smartphone or tablet. To start exploring more waterfall hikes in the Hamilton region, check out hamiltonwaterfalls.geotrail.ca

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Paul Shaker is co-founder of Geotrail, a social enterprise that promotes hiking and outdoor education. For more, see Geotrail.ca.

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