

Three Autumn Hikes to Eugenia Falls

WORDS & PHOTOS BY JUANITA METZGER

Sitting high in the Niagara Escarpment above the Cuckoo Valley, Eugenia Falls' straight-drop limestone cliffs and tumbling waters of the Beaver River have drawn Indigenous people living on the land, European settlers with economic interests and outdoor enthusiasts like me, enjoying nature and a place to hike.

The Beaver River plunges 30 metres over the limestone cliff Eugenia Falls, seen from a lookout along the Bruce Trail. Walking out on the rocks above the falls is extremely unsafe and signs indicate that it is strictly prohibited.



As a perpetual wanderer and traveller, I often ask people about their favourite day trips or excursions around Ontario as inspiration for my next adventure. In one summer, four different friends mentioned their love of Eugenia Falls, a picturesque cascade at the southern edge of the Beaver Valley in Grey County. I was persuaded to put Eugenia Falls on my destination list, as clearly, this natural gem had somehow escaped my radar.

It was October when I finally made the trip to Eugenia. Before the season drifted into winter, I squeezed in three hikes. Each day on the trail taught me to notice something distinctive about its natural, historic and cultural significance.

The 30-metre waterfall is accessed at Eugenia Falls Conservation Area, located in the town of Eugenia and

managed by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority since 1968. Hikers on the Bruce Trail pass the falls at km 56.2 when traversing the Beaver Valley section of the trail. Access to the base of the falls is strictly prohibited.

My first hike, on a warm fall day that still felt like summer, began at km 54 of the Bruce Trail, accessed via North Street, just north of the town of Eugenia. I passed open meadows before the trail turned left into the forest and began a steady climb. Bright yellow fluttering aspen leaves and red maples framed the blue sky like a painter's palette of primary colours.

I reached the heights above Eugenia Falls and took in the vista looking south over the Cuckoo Valley before descending a steep section towards the falls. Here, the path follows the Beaver River, and moss-covered rocks and cedar roots demand attention.

Built Structures

I spotted the man-made stone arches and a stone building along the trail, reminders of attempts by early settlers to harness the energy of the falls. The small stone building, now covered in graffiti, sitting on the downstream side of the trail, was built by William Hogg in the early 1890s. He saw the potential for hydro-electric power along the Beaver River and engineered enough to supply the growing town of Eugenia, its small mills and the town of Flesherton to the southwest. Hogg had big plans to supply power to Toronto but was outbid by the Niagara Electric Plant.

Two stone arches mark the ends of a tunnel dug by a second power company in the early 1900s with big plans to divert the river through a tunnel and over the falls. The tunnel was blown up not long after it was built when the government

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▲ The Bruce Trail rises and falls, just like the Beaver River and Eugenia Falls, which it follows. The higher points of the trail make perfect lookouts over the Beaver Valley and Cuckoo Valley filled with vibrant colours of fall.

▲ North of Eugenia Falls Conservation Area, the Beaver Valley Lookout on Grey Road 13 is a worthwhile stop on a bright fall day.

▼ The Beaver River tumbles over limestone rocks before it descends over the 30-metre drop at Eugenia Falls.

▼ This stone arch is the remnant of a 1905 plan to build a diversion tunnel for the Beaver River, leading to power generation at the bottom of the falls.





▲ The first snowfall of the season creates a hushed and peaceful landscape for a late fall hike. It also makes the trail extra slippery.

gained control of rivers and streams and set up the Hydro Electric Commission to build the infrastructure for a growing population. By 1915, the commission constructed a dam east of Eugenia Falls and the water flowing over the falls is a fraction of what it once was. I took my second hike on a crisp, clear autumn day. The smell of dry leaves and damp ground lingered with every step. I started at Eugenia Falls Conservation Area (km 56.2) and headed south. Here, the Bruce Trail skirts the cliff top overlooking the Cuckoo Valley and the Beaver River below and offers a glimpse back to the falls, which from this distance, is silent.

First Nations
As I wandered the short out-and-back route through cedars and towering deciduous

trees to the Lower Valley Rd, returning to Eugenia Falls, I wondered about this area before settlers arrived. Other than one sentence on the conservation area information board that reads, "When first discovered, Eugenia Falls had more water rushing over the edge and the native people called the falls *Ke-waid-dun-dot*, meaning Sparkling Waters", one could be led to think that settlers "discovered" Eugenia Falls in the 1850s. The Anishnaabe, however, (also called Ojibwe by European first contacts) populated almost two million acres around Georgian Bay and Lake Superior. Their territory would have included all of present-day Grey and Bruce counties. Communities moved according to the hunting seasons so it's highly likely the rich ecology of the river would have attracted

Anishnaabe families year round. Grey Roots Museum & Archives lists dozens of First Nations archaeological artifacts in its collection such as potsherds, pipes, and tools that were plowed up in area farmers' fields, indicating the area has a much deeper cultural history than we know. I took my third hike on a November morning after the first snow of the season blanketed the trees and ground. I hiked with Sonya and Ron Ward, volunteers with the Beaver Valley Club, which maintains almost 114 km of the Bruce Trail. Together they are trail captains for 1.5 kms of trail around Eugenia Falls. For more than 10 years the Wards have been hiking it regularly to keep it safe. They became volunteers shortly after 29 kms of trail were added by the Beaver Valley Club, now

known as the Falling Water section. Opened in 2008, the additional trails were a result of the club's efforts to secure new landowner agreements, purchase new parcels of land and physically construct new connections on the trail. We followed their regular route from the pedestrian bridge on the side of Grey Road 13, downstream past the falls, along the Escarpment edge and down the gentle rocky slope to Lower Valley Rd, the same route I hiked before. We walked quietly through the insulated hush, feeling the occasional updraft from the valley to our right as the wind shook drips and plops of wet snow on our jackets. The Wards assured me they don't get bored hiking this trail. Instead, they love the familiarity of knowing where to look for Trilliums in the spring and where to find a



▼ Walkers pass this stone building above the falls, which was built in 1895 by William Hogg. It was the power house containing two turbines that generated enough power to provide electricity to the town of Eugenia and nearby Flesherton. It sits in poor condition.



Sonya and Ron Ward are trail captains for the 1.5-km section of Bruce Trail beside Eugenia Falls. They have been volunteers for more than ten years with the Beaver Valley Club whose members maintain and support 114 km of the trail in the Beaver Valley.

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▲ Walking out on the rocks above Eugenia Falls is extremely unsafe and signs indicate that it is strictly prohibited.

▼ Wild apples from old trees can be found along this section of the Bruce Trail.



The Bruce Trail was closed in Spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 State of Emergency enacted by the Province of Ontario. At the time of writing, 85 per cent of the trail has re-opened and the Bruce Trail Conservancy is in the process of a staged re-opening of the remaining sections. Check the Bruce Trail website www.bruce-trail.org or their app for any closures before setting out. Please hike responsibly and never cross "Closure" barriers.

snack of wild apples in the fall. They believe being on the trail is the perfect combination of nature conservancy, protecting a place for people to explore and sharing what they have learned with

others. They particularly love to see young families venture farther down the trail for more than a 15-minute view of the falls before they hop back in the car. Three visits and many

hours on a four-km section of trail feel like I'm just scratching the surface. I am developing a connection to this place. Soon I'll be the one telling everyone how much I love Eugenia Falls. **NEV**

Juanita Metzger is a freelance travel writer based in Kitchener with a passion for slow travel and hyper local adventures. When not travelling, she hosts guided walking tours in Waterloo Region.



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