

A photograph of a forest trail. The foreground is dominated by large, moss-covered rocks and dense green foliage, including large-leafed plants. The trail leads into a wooded area with tall trees and a dappled light effect. The overall scene is lush and natural.

TWO-DOG TREK: Other-Worldly Sights on Silver Creek's Bruce Trail

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY KATELYNN BAKSA-WILTSHIRE

A late summer hike on the Bruce Trail in Silver Creek Conservation Area in north Halton, was a two-dog experience: one, my energetic herder always eager to go further, and the other, my puppy working hard to tough it out.



▲ The natural arrangement of these stones on the trail gives the feeling of a medieval stairway.



◀ August, left, and Milo the puppy, are ready to start the hike.



▲ Light coming through the trees gives this well-worn part of the Bruce Trail, with its protruding roots, a magical, mystical feeling. The blue blazes mark the Roberts Side Trail.

Last summer I hiked in Silver Creek Conservation Area in north Halton, with my two dogs, Milo, a Bernese Mountain Dog who was four months old at the time, and August, who was seven and seems to be an Australian Shepherd-Lab cross. Both dogs, being true to their breeds, can be a hassle to walk. The “Berner” is a winter breed and not very energetic, while the Shepherd is an energy-filled herding dog.

Walking the two has Milo lagging behind or flopping down whenever he gets the chance, while August loves to lead the pack or herd us ahead. This being Milo’s first hike, it was interesting to see how he reacted.

We commenced our journey on a late summer’s day, the mid-afternoon air cool with the approach of autumn on our heels. The start was at 27 Side Road and 9th Line north of Georgetown. The hike followed the main

white Bruce Trail until we took a loop back to the car on the Roberts Blue Side Trail. Speaking from experience, if you take this trail, don’t hike alone but bring along a friend for safety, as the terrain is fairly rocky and I twisted my previously-injured ankle a couple of times during the trek. It wasn’t serious and I was hiking with two others, so I was in no danger.

At the trail entrance there’s a big sign for Silver Creek Conservation Area, plus a

structure displaying a map of the trails and a bench that is much lower to the ground than it seems. Once you sit down you don’t come back up easily. Past the map structure, the trail starts.

The ground turns rocky and gets even more so up the steady incline. Approaching the entrance to the Irwin Quarry Side Trail, we stuck to the left, where stones grow into boulders and deepen into crevices. Towards the cliff edge the rocks become

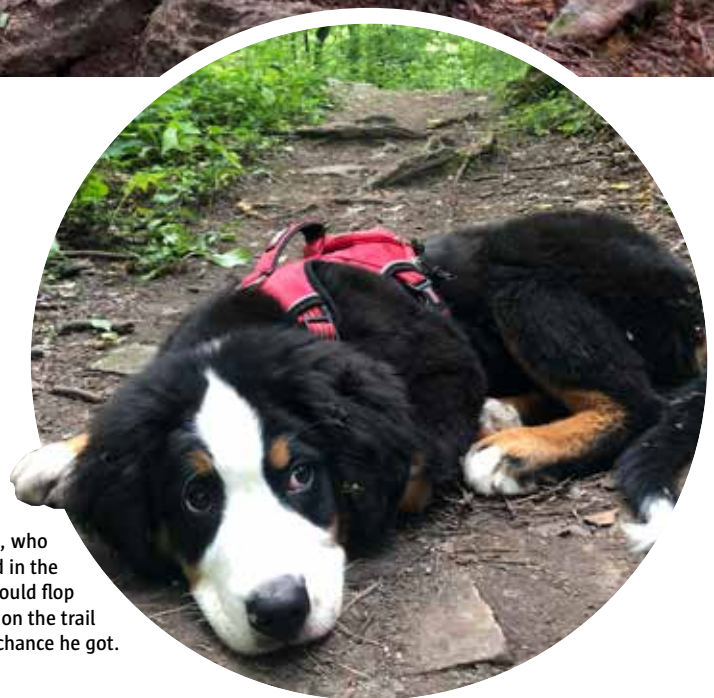


▲ The trail leads up toward the cliff edge, with this large boulder marking the beginning of the dramatic Escarpment outcropping.

more confident, standing out proudly from the soil, acting like medieval stepping stones. Some rocks are so big that walking on them is like boulder hopping. Climbing to the top of one you can have a look at the way you came.

Puppy-Dog Tired

Above the boulders, at the high part of the trail, is a big view over the Escarpment edge. In front of my face were the tops of towering deciduous trees, many climbing up the



► Milo, who tired in the heat, would flop down on the trail every chance he got.



▲ A lookout protected by a barrier keeps onlookers back from the Escarpment edge where the view of a forest stretches to the horizon.

► Protruding stones filling the trail make a challenging walk for both humans and dogs.

edge of the Escarpment, some intruding on the view of the chasm below. Their leaves were just getting ready to turn as the late summer day was nearing into fall. In a couple of weeks, the leaves would be decked out in their autumn apparel. We continued parallel to the cliff face along the narrow path which nears the daunting drop into the chasm below, with trees acting as a buffer between us and the edge.

We came to a lookout protected by a metal barrier, but you have to be careful

with your dogs here. The view is staggering and better than the previous one, as my eyes were not in line with the trees but above the canopies that are blanketing the horizon.

The trek downhill is just as rocky as the climb upwards. My puppy, Milo, gave up halfway, making a dramatic doggie flop to the ground and looking up at me with practised puppy eyes as if to say “Must we continue? I am tired, human.” We trudged along the steady descent, reaching an

interesting tree with a large branch that bent towards the trail before sloping upwards, creating the shape of the letter “L”. I thought it was the perfect place to do a little climb. In the midst of my dismount, while I was bent over the branch upside down, I was interrupted by Milo and August, looking up at me with curiosity in their eyes.

Mythical Scenes

The hike from then on was moderately rocky, facing some inclines and declines, reaching big crevices in the cliff face,

perfect for a little cave trek. There are multiple crevices along the hike, where those brave and limber enough could take a close look at the rock formations. Some crevices are so imposing that it was as if they were leading me into the depths of the earth, reminding me of the myth of Hades and Persephone in the underworld.

Further on the trail, the boulders and rocks sink into the earth, but Milo was timid walking between them as he was too small to walk across the tops of them. Yet



▲ The darkness in the crevices in the rock at the edge of the Escarpment is spooky and mysterious.



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▲ This view from the Escarpment edge, of grapevines cloaking the trees, looks like a rainforest.

► Milo, a tired pup at the end of his gruelling first hike.

my Shepherd August was pulling me on ahead. The scenery became less rocky as we came among slender trees, but here was where I twisted my ankle. You'd think that once we had gotten past the rocky bit we'd be in the clear, but no, there are more causes of potential injury than simply rocks. Be careful of roots protruding in the path.

Gradually sloping down the Escarpment edge, thick foliage filled the forest floor, reminiscent of a rainforest. There were some interesting

trees, including a deformed one that looks as if it's growing lopsided and one that looks like it has an open wound. I found a hollow at the base of a tree that looks straight out of *Lord of the Rings* or Narnia. I half expected a little hobgoblin to come out and start yelling at me to get off his property.

We veered from the main Bruce Trail to return to the car on the Roberts Blue Side Trail. At this point the dogs were hot and looking for water as we came across a little creek with low water levels

under a small footbridge. We followed the thin narrow trail bordered by tall skinny trees where Milo decided it was a nice place to take a nap, while August was ready for more.

A couple hundred of metres past the creek lies the boardwalk. When I was in elementary school, we made a field trip here to Silver Creek Outdoor Education Centre, where we ended up at this same place. The large new boardwalk looks out to a stunning pond ripe with toads and water lilies.

We came back to the place we started, completing the loop. The dogs were happy to jump back into the car and I didn't hear a peep from them the rest of the day. They slept soundly that night, probably dreaming of frolicking through the rocks or maybe a nice juicy sausage. **NEV**

Katelynn Baksa-Wiltshire's last piece for Niagara Escarpment Views was "View from a Summer Student: Suburban Girl Takes on the Escarpment Forest," Winter 2020-21.



▲ A hollow at the base of a tree is reminiscent of the homes of mythical creatures like hobbits or elves.



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