

# Preserving Keefer Falls, a Niagara

By Beth Gilhespy

**S**ome places don't need much explanation. You arrive, you pause, and something in you says: this matters. Keefer Falls is one of those places.

Keefer Falls has been in private ownership since the 1800s. Now, the landowner wants the waterfall and 117 acres of surrounding lands preserved, and reached out to our organization. With an agreement to purchase now in place and a deadline of December 2026, the task ahead is to raise the funds necessary for this ambitious – but incredibly important – acquisition. The landowner has made a generous financial commitment to the acquisition, and with a grant recently awarded by the provincial government, our fundraising goal is now \$800,000. Will you help us create the Keefer Falls Nature Preserve?

The first time I visited the land, just northeast of Owen Sound near the community of Annan, I remember following the sound before I ever saw the water. Keefer Creek begins quietly. Cold, clear water rises from springs high on the Niagara Escarpment, and winds its way through

meadow and forest. Then, almost without warning, it reaches the edge. The creek spills eight metres over a shelf of ancient Manitoulin Dolostone, fanning into a steady, silvery curtain.

I meant to have a quick visit, just in and out. I stayed much longer.

What struck me wasn't just the falls themselves, it was everything around them. As I followed the stream I began to understand the place more fully. For nearly a kilometre, the creek moves through a landscape that still feels intact: open grasslands, pockets of forest, rocky gorge, and that winding ribbon of cold water that quietly supports fish and other life.

## Countless Species

Nearby woodlands and regenerating fields, planted with mixed tree species over the past decade, offer habitat for forest birds including the Red-headed Woodpecker, along with countless other species that depend on a connected mosaic of meadow, forest, and stream.

In early summer Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark call out across the fields. These are sounds that have become far too rare in southern Ontario. And when we hear them, it

feels like things are still working the way they're supposed to.

Keefer Falls lies within the Territory of the Saugeen Ojibway Nation and forms part of a living cultural landscape that long predates settler history. Visible remnants of the more recent Slattery Mill remain on the property, reflecting the area's recent industrial past. Artist Tom Thomson spent time near the falls and wrote about swimming beneath them as a child. Keefer Falls has been discovered and rediscovered for generations.

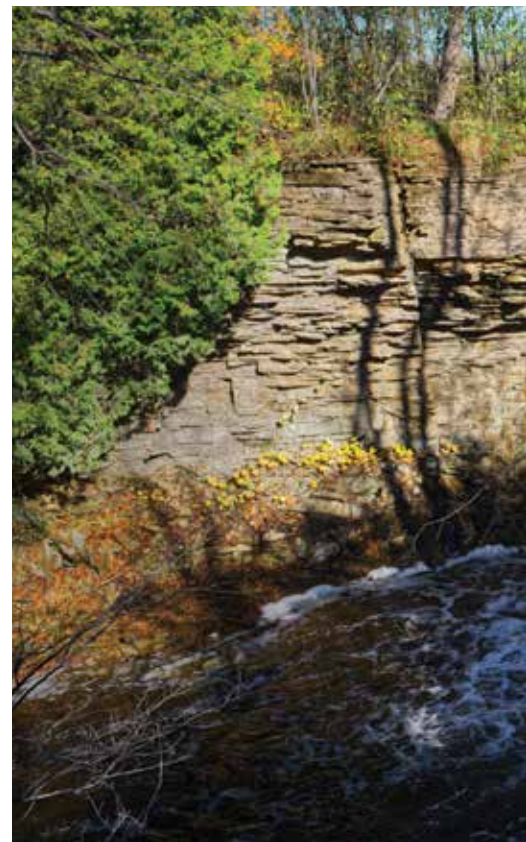
The only structures on the land are the remains of the old Slattery Mill. Otherwise, it's an oasis of fields, forest, river, and gorge. Over time, we'd like to establish a simple interpretive footpath that allows people to walk through the nature preserve and learn more about its natural and cultural history.

## Living Landscape

Places like Keefer Falls are

easy to overlook precisely because they aren't dramatic in the way we often expect. But to me, that's what makes Keefer Falls so compelling. It isn't just a waterfall. It's a whole living landscape that still fits together: the water, the land, the wildlife, and the way people experience it.

And that stays with me.



▲ Keefer Falls. PHOTO BY ROB WRAY.

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# Escarpment Gem



There's something quietly powerful about recognizing a place like this and deciding it's worth preserving. Not to change it, or polish it, or turn it into something else, but simply to make sure it's still here, just as it is, for the coming generations.

I think that's why Keefer Falls resonates with me so much. It reminds me how simple it can be. It's just a creek, a falls, a field, a forest, and yet it feels complete.

Keefer Falls Nature Preserve: a vital part of the Niagara Escarpment's living landscape.

*To learn more about Keefer Falls and our work to create the Keefer Falls Nature Preserve, please go to [escarpment.ca/about/campaigns/living-landscapes-campaign](http://escarpment.ca/about/campaigns/living-landscapes-campaign) or contact Beth Gilhespy directly at [beth@escarpment.ca](mailto:beth@escarpment.ca)*

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