

Hike Happy Valley Forest or cycle to the Humber Valley in Toronto-area day trips

Toronto Star

By: John Barber

September 11, 2020

Original URL: <https://www.thestar.com/life/travel/2020/09/08/hike-happy-valley-forest-or-cycle-to-the-humber-valley-in-toronto-area-day-trips.html>

September is a great time to get outdoors in the GTA. Here are some suggestions for a day out of the house, but be sure to check ahead with the appropriate websites for any special conditions due to COVID-19.



Happy Valley Forest

The faster the suburban frontier approaches, the more remarkable the Happy Valley Forest becomes, still largely undisturbed after two centuries of wanton cutting all around it. It is not only the closest real forest to Toronto, just 15 kilometres due north of Canada's Wonderland, but it is the most extensive woodland complex along the entire 160-km length of the Oak Ridges Moraine — itself the largest span of contiguous forest in the settled south of the province. Happy Valley hosts an exceptional array of woodland birds, being one of the few Canadian habitats left for such threatened species as the hooded

warbler and Acadian flycatcher. The forest is also home to creek valleys, wooded swamps, kettle ponds and minor wetland areas. A huge range of tree species thrive here, including maples, beech, oak, birch, hemlock and aspen, and all of it is easily visible from the top of a suburban roller-coaster.

The Happy Valley Forest can be challenging to navigate but there is a map and other interpretive material posted at the Goldie Feldman Nature Reserve, a popular starting point for hikes.

There are no washroom facilities in the forest or at the trailheads and heat and bugs sometimes discourage summer outings, but come September, Happy Valley is one of the best places in the GTA to experience fall colours. Be sure you pack plenty of water, snacks and a GPS.

Cycle to the Humber Valley

If there were nominees for best cycling day trips out of Toronto, the list would have to include a ride up the Humber Valley to Kleinburg for a visit to the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, a picnic on its sculpture-dotted grounds and a leisurely evening spin back down the valley into the city. The valley is gorgeous all the way north, and the river route that led to Toronto centuries ago is once again a pathway, its headwaters a nexus of trails that spread out like green veins throughout central Ontario. In addition to great Canadian art, the area around Kleinburg is awash with outdoor opportunities, both tame and on the wilder side.

The McMichael Canadian Art Collection is an essential destination. Even if you think you've already seen enough of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, the McMichael reminds you that you haven't. But it's no mere museum of an old nationalism. The gallery's programming consistently explores new connections to contemporary art while maintaining its central preoccupation with the Canadian landscape.

Pack a lunch, eat outdoors and enjoy a walk in the surrounding Humber River forest.

Another great destination is the Albion Hills Conservation Area, a 30-minute drive north of Kleinburg. It could well be the most popular place of its kind in Ontario, thanks to its proximity to Toronto, its spaciousness and the sheer variety of organized programming available. Mountain bikes and cross-country runners dominate the trails in the summer, while winter attracts the largest number of cross-country skiers in the region.

Despite the occasional crush on a fair-weather weekend, winter or summer, Albion Hills still offers the ideal introduction to outdoor adventure in the Toronto region. It's located off Highway 50, just north of Bolton.

This excerpt was taken from "Day Trips Around Toronto" by John Barber, with permission from Firefly Books.