

Designation of the Humber – 20th Anniversary

A plaque in Ojibway, French and English was unveiled on September 24, 1999, to record the designation of the Humber River as Canada's 26th Heritage River.

THE HUMBER RIVER

The Humber River watershed, the largest river system in the Toronto region, covers 908 square kilometres. From its source on the Oak Ridges Moraine and Niagara Escarpment, the Humber flows through outstanding natural habitats in rural and urban landscapes, to Lake Ontario.

At least 12,000 years ago, the watershed was home to Aboriginal Peoples. They established an overland route along the river corridor to the Canadian interior. Later, European explorers and settlers used this route they called the Toronto Carrying Place trail. Today the Humber provides recreational and educational opportunities and a spiritual retreat for thousands of people of many different cultures.

The plaque commemorates the designation of the Humber River as a Canadian Heritage River and honours those people – past, present and future – who work to protect and enhance the Humber's heritage and recreation resources.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We gratefully acknowledge the following for such valuable resources.

Bones of the Ancestors – The Archaeology and Osteobiography of the Moatfield Ossuary, published by Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2003, Editors – Ronald F. Williamson and Susan Pfeiffer

From Pits to Playgrounds, 1992, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Ed Freeman, Geologist

Heritage River Nomination Document, 1998, Metro Toronto and Region Conservation Authority

History of Weston, 1938, F. D. Cruickshank, M D. and J. Nason, B. A., L. L. B., Weston Historical Society

HTO, Christine Palassio and Wayne Reeves, Coach House Books, 1998

The Merchant-Millers of the Humber Valley, 1985, Sidney Thomson Fisher

The Pleistocene of the Toronto Region, Canadian Department of Mines

Times & Guide, various issues

Toronto Rocks, 1998, Nick Eyles and Laura Clinton, The Geological Legacy of Toronto Region, University of Toronto Region, University of Toronto, Scarborough

The Wadsworth Letters: Family Correspondence 1816-1857, 2007, Montgomery's Inn Museum, Co-editors Jeanine Avigdor and Randall Reid

Weston Council Proceedings

Journey to the Ice Age, Peter L. Storck

westonhistoricalsociety.com

1901 Weston Road, Unit F,

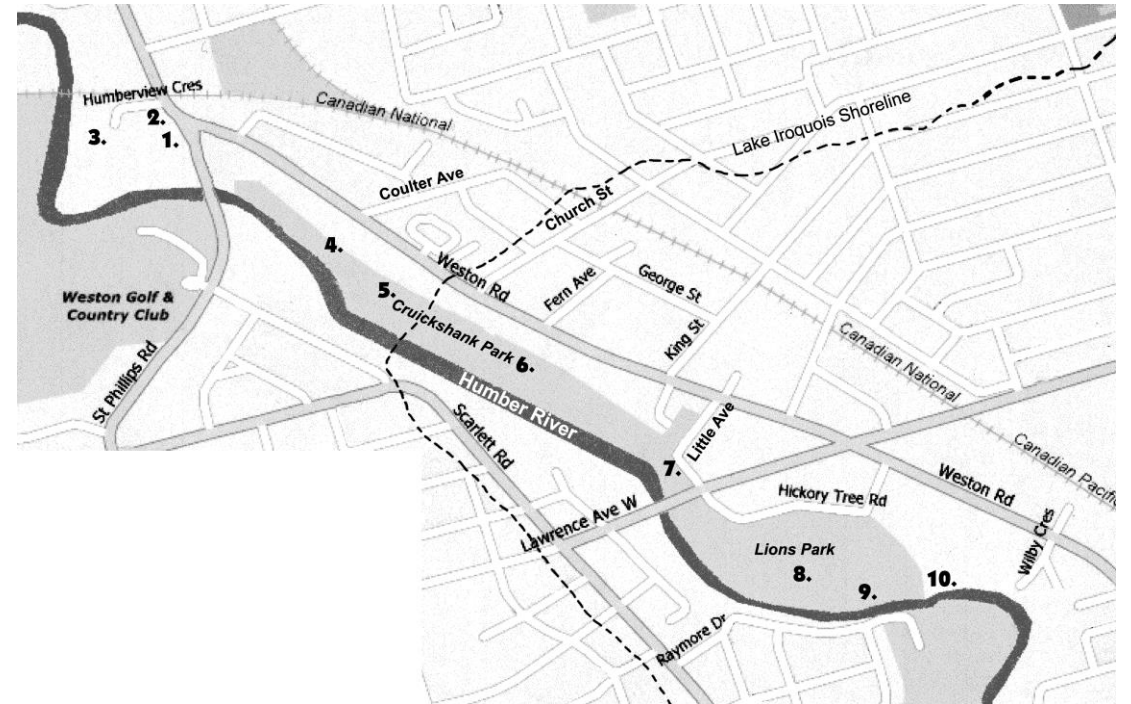
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FROM FOSSILS TO FOUNDATIONS Our Enduring Relationship with the Humber River Presented by the Weston Historical Society, September 2024



The Humber River has national significance because of the long interaction with the people who have lived near its banks and to whom the river was vital for their existence. This walk along our small portion of the Humber will illustrate the human use of the river as it evolved over the last 12,000 years.

START WALK AT MALLABY PARK (NW Corner of Weston Road & St. Phillips Road)

1. Paleo-Indian Peoples

About 12,000 years ago, as the glaciers receded and the caribou migrated north, fur-clad nomadic people made their way into today's southern Ontario from the Ohio Valley. They hunted wild game and fished on the tundra-like shorelines. These people could be considered our first human inhabitants.

Archaic Peoples

Over time the climate changed. The area became forested. Hunters and gatherers moved north along the river valleys from the Ohio Valley. They hunted and gathered wild plants and berries.

Woodland Peoples

Pottery began to appear along with stone axes and spear points. It is believed that 500 years later the three sisters – corn, beans and squash were introduced. The stationary food supply and the ability to store food led these people to become horticulturalists and to stay in one place longer.

Toronto Carrying Place Trail

Because the Humber River could not be canoed the Indigenous people created the Toronto Carrying Place Trail. You are standing right next to it. It ran parallel to the river and provided a transportation and trade route for the native people.

French Era

Life for the Indigenous people was radically changed with the coming of the Europeans. The first of these were the French in 1610. They wanted to do business but only in trading as many furs as possible. The French brought, among other things, metal axes, iron pots and knives. They also brought diseases, religious zealots and alcohol. But the French were traders, not settlers.

The Coming of the British

The Seven Years War between Britain and France ended in 1763. That and the end of the American Revolution, left Britain with a lot of thinly defended land. People were needed to settle the land to prevent a possible American expansion.

The Toronto Purchase Treaty was signed by the Mississaugas in 1787 and renegotiated in 1805. This would include the land in this area.

English surveyors marked and reserved for the Crown, which was the government, the best mill sites on the Humber watershed, to be leased to future mill owners.

John Graves Simcoe arrived in 1793 and explored the Carrying Place Trail but rejected it as a possible military highway. He was impressed by the Weston area and granted himself 1200 acres. The land you are standing on was part of Lt. Gov. Simcoe's estate.

WALK NORTH ON WESTON ROAD (WEST SIDE) AND STOP AT HUMBERVIEW CRESCENT

the leading Canadian and American competitors.

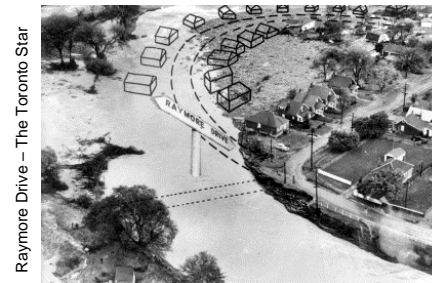
For many years the area was underused and under managed. Finally in 1944/45 the Weston Lions took over the fairgrounds and made it into a place for all to enjoy. They built a lacrosse box that seated 2800 people with flood lighting and change rooms. Today there is the Lion's arena, tennis courts, swimming pool, soccer fields, skate park and children's playground all next to the Humber River.

In and On the Humber

In the winter, skating was a favorite pastime for Weston's young people. Even without lighting, a Zamboni or change rooms large numbers enjoyed the frozen surface any day of the week.

Thanks to the Wadsworth dam the old swimming hole was a popular spot in the summer despite skinned knees and stone bruises. People objected to the boys' skinny dipping and unsuitable language, but it was the only place to go. It was not a very safe activity though and as the water became lower there wasn't much to swim in. In 1925 all swimming in the Humber within four miles of the town was prohibited.

CONTINUE SOUTH ON THE BIKE PATH, PAST THE BASEBALL DIAMONDS, UNTIL JUST BEFORE THE FOOTBRIDGE CROSSING THE RIVER



10. Hurricane Hazel

The torrential storm known as Hurricane Hazel struck on the night of October 15, 1954.

In a 24-hour period 8 inches of water fell on already saturated ground in the Humber watershed. Three hundred million tons of water had to be drained by the Humber and its tributaries.

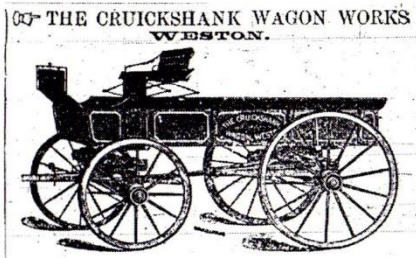
In the Weston area alone, the steep banks caused the river to rise 30 feet. This violent storm took the lives of 32 persons, destroyed an entire street of fourteen homes, left 60 families homeless, and destroyed four of the five bridges between the 401 and Raymore Drive.

The arena built in 1949, held strong but the tennis courts and lacrosse box was wiped out.

After 1954, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority implemented flood control measures and supervised development of today's outstanding park system.

7. Cruickshank Park

Cruickshank Park exists today due to a consolidation of private lands in the river valley.



Cruickshanks operated a buggy works and then a successful car dealership.

The first purchase was a small parcel of land from Anne Rowntree in 1899 which came to be known as Sunset Park.

In 1928, Dr. Fred Cruickshank donated the family property on the riverfront to the Town. There was confusion with the boundaries as the two parks were separated by small parcels of private properties. It was not until 1952 that Town Council acquired the lands between the two parks so they could become one.

Today it is used throughout the year by anyone wanting a few moments of respite to commune with nature.

WALK UNDER THE LAWRENCE AVENUE BRIDGE, CONTINUE ALONG THE PAVED BIKE PATH TO A BIT BEYOND THE TENNIS COURTS IN LIONS PARK.

8. The End of the Milling Era

Joseph Holley built a sawmill for John Chew, on this site. It went through many mills and owners up until 1870. The Weston Woolen Mill, operated by Oliver Wilby, was the most successful. At its peak it employed up to 200 people. Among their many products, they made “shoddy” – a coarse cloth much like denim. In 1896 the mill was forced to shut down and the land was sold.

With the end of the milling era a new role for the river began as a recreational resource.

9. Weston Fairgrounds to Lions Park

Eventually the Woolen Mill land was owned by the Weston Agricultural Society, although the fair building was owned by the Cruickshanks. This building was used for get-togethers and picnics in the summer and converted into a skating rink in the winter. And of course, the grounds were used for the annual two-day Weston Fall Fair. Picnics, church fairs, marathon races, baseball and lacrosse games were allowed by permit but mostly it was underused to the point where cows grazed on it. In 1912 it was purchased by the Weston Council.

In 1913 a half mile track was added to allow for horse and bicycle racing. This track was used in the famous 1922 Dunlop Trophy Race. Three thousand people came to watch the

2. Mill Builders on the Humber River

The Humber River in the Weston area dropped 16 feet in just over a mile. This was ideal to provide power for future mills. Mills provided a focus for community development such as a general store, blacksmith, cooperage, distillery.

In 1957 the Conservation Authority and the Town of Weston installed the millstone in North End Park to commemorate the milling era.



PROCEED ON HUMBERVIEW CRESCENT UNTIL THE BEND IN THE ROAD

3. The Holley Family

David Holley and his family immigrated to Canada in 1807, settling in today’s Rowntree Mills Park area. Patriarch David Holley sought out and negotiated leases for mill sites on the Humber. In the Weston area, a 99-year lease was obtained for land on the west side of the Humber, just north of St. Phillips bridge where his son Joseph built a mill complex. Joseph Holley became known as a very accomplished contractor who built mills up and down the Humber.

In 1828 the Simcoe estate came on the market and was purchased by Joseph Holley who subsequently built his home (6 Humberview Crescent) of adobe brick circa 1835.

Wadsworth Mill Complex

In 1828 brothers Charles and William Rein Wadsworth bought the lease to the mill complex built by Joseph Holley and enlarged the flour mill. In 1830 they built a sawmill and in 1840 erected a distillery in the valley. They replaced the flour mill in 1856. It was considered the most modern of all mills in Upper Canada.

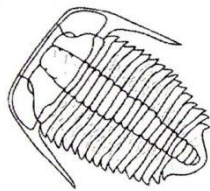


William was a very astute businessman. He kept in contact with family and friends in England and through that knowledge was able to anticipate market conditions and operate very effectively. Charles and William and their sons Tom Rodney and Vernon operated the mills for almost 90 years.

The land is now owned by the Weston Golf and Country Club.

RETURN TO MALLABY PARK OVER TO THE SOUTH SIDE OF THE PARK. TAKE THE STEPS DOWN TOWARD THE RIVER. PROCEED SOUTH ALONG THE PATHWAY THROUGH THE PARK, AND STOP AT THE DAM

4. Weston's Geology



Trilobite Fossil

Four hundred and forty-five million years ago Weston was covered by inland seas. Tropical hurricanes tossed the skeletal fragments of trilobites, gastropods and brachiopods with rock particles and volcanic ash. They sank into the clay and mud of the sea floor to form the sedimentary rock of the Humber Valley.

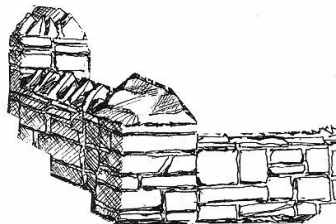
The last glacier of Weston's ice ages retreated over 12,000 years ago. Water levels rose and formed the deep glacial Lake Iroquois. Its shoreline reached up to Weston.

From Fossils to Foundations

As the water from the glaciers receded, erosion exposed the sedimentary shale creating the steep sided valley of the Humber River.

Since the early settlers, the Humber River shale has been used for foundations, walls, and houses.

Now it is known as a finite resource that cannot be replaced as "mining" the river is not allowed. Today the stone walls have attained iconic status.



Water and Ice

In addition to the rocks and food that the river supplied we have also taken its water and ice. For many years large blocks of ice were harvested from the river to supply Weston's homemade ice boxes.

In 1909, Weston established a waterworks system that used the Humber River as its source.

CONTINUE SOUTH THROUGH THE PARK, STOP AT THE STONE NEAR THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND

The River Takes Away

The Humber River gives a great deal, but it also takes away. Spring freshets (floods) took their toll. The 1850 flood caused all the people in the valley, save the Wadsworths, to relocate to the east side of the river.

The river has also taken its toll in drownings. Young and old, male and female – even some dogs have lost their lives due to stepping in a hole, skating on thin ice or trying to save others. The river does not discriminate.

The Mill Race

See insert.

5. Mills and Milling

On the site where you are standing there was a sawmill built by Joseph Holley for John Porter in 1826. It had a long mill race. Rowland Burr bought the mill site, reinforced the mill race and built a woolen mill. This burnt down and so he sold both the mill, and the mill race to Robert McDougall.

You can now walk what we believe would have been the tail race to McDougall's new flour mill.

CONTINUE SOUTH BOUND, "WALKING THE MILL RACE", THROUGH THE PARK ABOUT 200 YARDS TO THE BENCH

6. Succession of Mill Owners

As stated, Rowland Burr sold his mill to Robert McDougall who built a large flour mill. In 1861 the mill was doing very well until he raised his dam so high that the Wadsworths objected. They sued McDougall who then had to lower his dam. In March 1882 he was forced to sell to the Wadsworths. In 1893, Tom Rodney Wadsworth sold the property to Cruickshank Wagonworks.

CONTINUE SOUTHBOUND TO THE BOTTOM OF THE STAIRS