

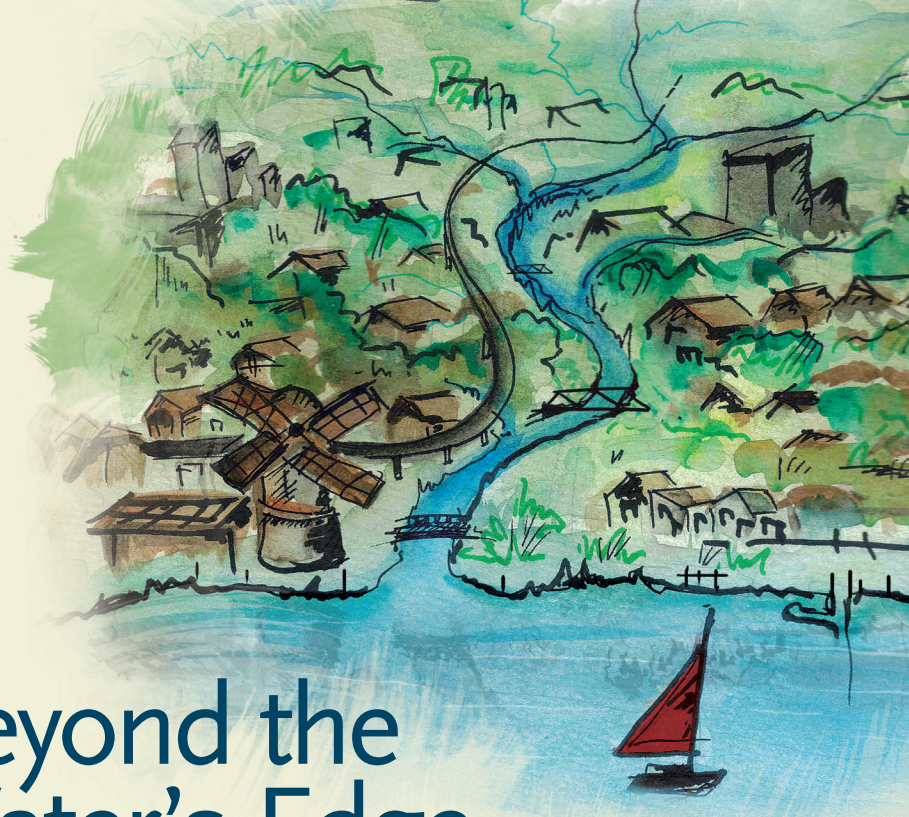
## Thirsty City is a series of walks exploring Toronto's historic and current water issues.

Discover the secret life of water in the city! You will learn about the remarkable water system that brings clean water to our taps, and the sewer system that takes polluted water – both sewage and stormwater – away. You will also rediscover ancient aquifers, springs and the network of creeks that once supported life here, and are now buried under the surface.

For more information about Thirsty City and more walks like this one visit [www.thirstycitywalks.ca](http://www.thirstycitywalks.ca)

# Thirsty City

A series of walks exploring the secret life of water in Toronto.



## Beyond the Water's Edge

Looking upstream and downstream from the mouth of the Don River

This walk starts at the mouth of the Don River at the north-west corner of Villiers Road and the Don Roadway. It will take approximately 90 minutes to complete.

### Walk Map



**Glossary**

**Delta** - a low triangular area of sediments deposited where a river divides before entering a larger body of water.

**Berm** - A mound of earth to provide protection from floods.

**Combined sewer** - A sewer pipe that carries both stormwater and sanitary waste to the sewage treatment plant.

**River mouth** - The place where river meets the lake or ocean.

**Sandbar/peninsula** - A ridge of sand formed along a shore by the action of waves or currents.

**Soil remediation** - a process that removes contaminants from soil.

**Stormwater** - Rainwater after it hits the ground surface.

**Watershed** - an area of land where surface water and groundwater drain into a common stream system.



RiverSides is a Toronto-based non-profit organization dedicated to helping communities protect and restore urban watersheds through stormwater pollution prevention.

[www.riversides.org](http://www.riversides.org)



Lost Rivers is a project of the Toronto Green Community to encourage understanding of the city as a part of nature rather than apart from it, and to appreciate and cherish our heritage.

[www.lostrivers.ca](http://www.lostrivers.ca)

Support for this self-guided tour has been generously provided by:



This walk is about the natural and social history of the lower Don. At the river's mouth was a delta full of intricate creeks and ponds, and an extensive marsh. This was biologically one of the richest sites in the Great Lakes. Almost encircling the delta, a long sandbar formed a peninsula which later became the Toronto Islands. The area was an important fishing and hunting ground for First Nations people; the peninsula was considered a sacred healing ground.

In 1830 under the British, the lands were opened to industry and settlement. Railways, and later expressways were built and the marsh was filled. When industries moved away by the late 20th century, it became a rather desolate, inaccessible and contaminated post-industrial "wasteland". Today, a new vision of ecological integrity has inspired collaboration across borders and jurisdictions, and many thousands of individuals to save the river and the lake.

- 1 Keating Channel
- 2 Pedestrian and Bike Trail Rest Area
- 3 West Don Lands
- 4 "Ghost Bridge"
- 5 Queen St. Bridge
- 6 Sunnac Creek
- 7 Cookshank Creek
- 8 Percy Park
- 9 Floodplain Architecture
- 10 Inglebrook Community High School, the Blackburn's Home
- 11 Distillery District
- 12 The Original Lakeshore, First Nations Encampments, & Active Land Claim

- Walking Route
- Point of Interest
- Street
- Ghost Bridge
- Building of Interest
- Lost River
- Historical Plaque
- Reinvigoration Area

## 1 Keating Channel Don River Mouth

Completed in 1922, this engineered channel was part of an “improvement” program for Ashbridge’s Bay and the Don Mouth. The advertised benefits included an end to contaminated water in the bay, space for railways, more industrial land, better access for international shipping, and flood protection. About 40,000 cubic metres of trash and sediment are dredged from the channel annually, and stored in concrete cells at the Leslie Street Spit.

## 2 Pedestrian and Bike Trail Rest Area Reintegrating Our Paths

The integration of pedestrian and bike paths and greenways into a continuous Lake Ontario Waterfront Trail has been a catalyst for collaboration - a creative approach to solving jurisdictional issues. Making improvements for pedestrians and wildlife can reduce the negative impacts of expressways: noise is decreased, air quality improved and linkages to water are increased.



Flooded Distillery District

1922, City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 1189

## 3 West Don Lands Restoration of a Post Industrial Landscape

Look west to the boarded off area by the river that is now called the West Don Lands.

Many industries prospered here from 1830 on: lumber and mineral extractors, paper, brick, chemical and beer manufacturers, and the Toronto Rolling Mills. Beginning in the 1960’s, industries left and large industrial buildings were demolished or abandoned. The lands had been polluted over the years. Now, as part of the waterfront revitalization plans work has begun to remediate soil, build a berm for flood protection and create a more naturalized Don Mouth.

## 4 “Ghost Bridge” Where King St. Met the Don River

Approaching the bridge, notice openings (outfall sewers) draining direct into the river, as well as pipes channeling water from elevated highways. These are visible paths of stormwater.



Old Sewer under Front Street

North of the bridge, sewer manholes hint at a complex drainage network. Combined sewers carry both stormwater and sanitary sewage. In major storms, the mixture overflows through outfalls instead of being treated first. Combined sewer overflows are a significant source of E.coli contamination of the Don and Lake Ontario. They contribute to Toronto’s listing as an “Area of Concern” by the International Joint Commission and are responsible for most beach closings. The City’s Wet Weather Flow Master Plan is an important part of the solution.

## 5 Queen St. Bridge Bridges Over Changing Waters

Between Gerrard and Queen Streets, the river flowed in a tight channel - the Don Narrows. Here, the potential for restoration is more restricted than anywhere else in the watershed: the narrow valley carries rails, Bayview Extension, utility corridors and the Don Valley Parkway, with industry and residential buildings in or close to the floodplain. The Task Force to Bring Back the Don has a vision for improvements within the narrow channel, and that includes improved access and re-naturalization wherever possible.

Notice the art piece on the bridge structure overhead:  
“This river I step in is not the river I stand in” - a quote from Heraclitus.

## 6 Sumac Creek Traces of a Lost River in Corktown

This spot, where historic creeks meandered through the sands of the Don Delta, was a Crown reserve until the 1830’s, “thickly forested, with solitary ill-defined paths ... a haunt for lawless characters”. Once it was opened to settlement and industry it became “Corktown”, a mainly Irish neighbourhood. Sumac Street echoes the name of the creek that once crossed Queen Street at this spot. Today, rainwater is carried in a storm sewer under Queen Street into the Don.



South from Queen St. - Don River Bridge

1929 Toronto Archives, Fonds 1231, Item 22

## 7 Crookshank Creek Bright St

You are now on the path of Crookshank Creek (also known as Vale Pleasant). The crooked houses on the curving street are a dead giveaway for the presence of unstable fill on a buried waterway. Some early maps show the creek flowing into the lake at the Distillery District, later maps show it joining up with Sumac Creek. Shifting courses are typical of river deltas.



Crooked Row Houses on Bright St

Ryan Rez, 2006

## 8 Percy Park - the “smallest park in the city” Hard and Soft Infrastructure Improvements

Percy Street is a unique private lane-way, owned by local homeowners since the late 1800’s. Maintenance of the water main beneath the street is the responsibility of residents. Due to high costs, the lead pipe from the early 1900’s remained while others across Toronto were replaced due to health concerns. In 2006, the pipe was replaced by a private developer to serve a nearby boutique condo, the same year Percy Park was re-designed. The little park is an example of a green infrastructural improvement that benefits both surface water quality and the community’s quality of life.

## 9 Floodplain architecture 1 Sumach Street

Today industrial buildings and freeways surround the cube building at 1 Sumach St. Built in 1996, it turns an overlooked site into a live-work location. This unconventional building style requires little ground excavation. The reduced footprint and elevated living area allow it to be built on environmentally-sensitive areas, such as flood plains. Based on Danish architect Piet Blom’s modular design, it was intended as a prototype for a larger affordable housing complex in the Portlands.

Walk west on Eastern Ave to the western side of the schoolyard.

## 10 Inglenook Community High School The Blackburn’s Home

Thornton and Lucie Blackburn built a home here in 1848 after escaping slavery in the US through the Underground Railroad. Urban dwellers like the Blackburns were drawn to available land here where they took advantage of local game and fish. Supplementing one’s income with such natural resources was possible here; this was “a place where even a poor man could take up a couple of acres, keep a cow and a few chickens, and perhaps plant a vegetable garden and a few fruit trees.”

Read the historical plaques just inside the east gate to learn about important contributions made by the Blackburns.

As you walk south on Trinity Street note the boarded up buildings. The shuttered Mill Paper Fibres building housed paper recycling, and stands across from Trinity Studios, representing successive manufacturing and film industries that have both attracted international workers and exported to international clients.

Note the historic plaque on the building at the right, before the gate.

## 11 Distillery District and the Windmill

To the surprise of the locals, who thought the low marshy land was not good for much more than hunting and fishing, James Worts chose this site for his flour mill in 1832. He built a Dutch style brick windmill which acted as a waterfront landmark and position marker for ships for nearly 25 years. Surveyors used it to lay out the city grid. In 1857, William Gooderham joined James Worts Jr. to expand into distilling alcohol. The distillery was active until 1990. Today, the historic district is a commercial and residential showcase of arts, culture and entertainment.



John Worts Windmill (1834)

1986, Toronto Public Library, T-31473

Note the plaque for the Windmill on the right as you walk towards the south parking lot.

## 12 The Original Lakeshore, First Nations Encampments, & Active Land Claim

The southern sidewalk of the Distillery District is roughly where the beach of Lake Ontario lay. Here and all the way along the sandbar to the island there were many First Nations encampments.

In 1787, the Chief Superintendent of Indian Affairs and three Mississauga chiefs negotiated a surrender of the lands that are central Toronto. Due to disputes about the unclear boundaries another Agreement was signed in 1805. In 1998, the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation filed a land claim that affects much of Toronto’s waterfront, the Don mouth and the Toronto Islands challenging fairness of the previous agreements. Both purchase agreements were understood to protect traditional hunting and fishing grounds, but in reality access for the Mississaugas was increasingly restricted.