

Fanshawe Lake Trail Guide

Fanshawe Conservation Area



Welcome to the Fanshawe Lake Trail. This trail offers spectacular views, all kinds of wildlife and a variety of terrain. As you hike or bike your way around Fanshawe Lake, you will travel 20 km through mature forest, open meadows and along three stretches of roadway.

Trail Markers

Bikers - Blue squares and black diamonds along the Lake Trail indicate the level of difficulty. The entire Lake Trail is marked with blue squares. Bikers have the option of riding the tougher black diamond sections.

Hikers - The Lake Trail is also part of the Thames Valley Trail (TVT), which runs from the southern border of Middlesex County to the Town of St. Marys. The white markers on the west side of the lake indicate the main TVT route. The blue biking markers on the east side indicate the secondary TVT trail.

The trail covers flat and rugged terrain with areas of steep hills, exposed roots and rocks.

Plan ahead, and know your abilities as well as the areas through which you are hiking or riding.

Permitted Activities

- hiking (Round trip hike: 4 - 5 hours)
- cycling (Round trip cycle: 1 - 2 hours)
- fishing
- dog walking (on a leash)

Low Water Crossings

There are two low water crossings on the trail, one over Wye Creek and one just south of the Thorndale bridge on the west side of the Thames River. During periods of high water flow, these sections of the trail may be impassable, in which case you will be asked to double back.

Please . . .

- Always carry your Cyclist / Pedestrian Pass
- Travel only on blazed trails and respect trail closures
- Slow down and use caution when approaching or overtaking other trail users
- Do not disturb wildlife or pick or transplant flowers
- Do not climb fences
- Keep dogs on leash
- Keep the trail free of litter

. . . Thank you!

Poison Ivy

Poison ivy grows in several areas along the Lake Trail. It is a very common plant in Ontario and its berries are an important food source for birds. The leaf of poison ivy has three leaflets. The stem of the middle leaflet is longer than that of the other two leaflets. The edges of the leaflets can be toothed (jagged) or smooth. Poison ivy grows as a plant up to two feet in height, or as a climbing vine on trees. To avoid contact with poison ivy, stay on the marked trails.

Fire - Ambulance - Police

Emergency Response (ER) signs have been placed every 500 m along the trail.

In case of an emergency:

Call 911, give the number located on the ER sign to assist emergency services in locating you on the trail.

For further information contact the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Telephone: 519-451-2800
E-mail: infoline@thamesriver.on.ca
Web site: www.thamesriver.on.ca
Mail: 1424 Clark Road, London, Ontario N5V 5B9

Step
Into Nature

UPPER THAMES RIVER
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

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Area 1

If you are hoping to see wildlife along the trail, plan your hike for early morning or evening. Along any part of the lake trail you may encounter deer, racoons, cottontails, chipmunks, squirrels, mink, mice, voles, groundhogs, opossum, snakes, toads and salamanders.

Area 2

This area is an approximately 60 year old upland forest dominated by maple and black cherry. Look for the many large black cherry trees along the trail, with their distinctive black bark that looks like burnt corn flakes. You will also see many white ash and hickory trees.

Walking along the trail, you may notice the noise and dust of gravel pit operations. The large number of gravel pits in and around Fanshawe Conservation Area is due to the region's glacial history. All of southern Ontario was shaped by glaciers. Approximately 12,000 years ago, a large lake covered the London region. A river of meltwater emptied into the lake from the northeast in the area where Fanshawe is today, dropping gravel and sand to form a large delta. When the lake drained, the delta was left, covered with a thin layer of topsoil. These aggregates form one of the best quality deposits in the province.

Area 3

Notice the transition from mature upland hardwood forest to riparian (riverside) floodplain, the Thames floodplain varies between tangles of tall plants and bushes and open meadows with scattered trees. The trees and shrubs that live in these areas must be able to tolerate flooding, and include species such as hawthorn, poplar, willow and sycamore, hackberry, white ash and black walnut. Some of the larger trees close to the water's edge may have been spared from logging due to their inaccessibility. Steep slopes are also often untouched by loggers.

Area 4

This pine plantation was planted about 25 years ago. It is now transforming naturally into a mixed lowland forest. Dying pine trees have allowed light to penetrate into the forest, giving way to white ash, black cherry, and maple. If you have ever spent time in a monoculture of conifers you will have noticed that very few birds or mammals have made it their home.

Area 5

The trail here passes through a second and even larger floodplain area. Bird species often seen in the floodplain include Canada goose, wood duck, mallard, red-tailed hawk and yellow warbler. Dense shrubs are home to the grey catbird and northern cardinal. If you look to the water you might see a great blue heron walking slowly, hoping to catch a fish or frog.

Area 6

Fanshawe Sugar Bush is located within this mature forest. Every March, the Sugar Bush presents a wealth of sights, sounds and smells in the time-honoured tradition of "tapping the trees." The Sugar Bush is operated by the Greater London Kinsmen and Kinettes, and features interpretive tours, hay rides, demonstrations and, of course, pancakes served with pure maple syrup. Maple sugar production has resulted in the harvesting of many of the other tree species, leaving primarily sugar maples in the woodlot. Along the north-facing river bank, the vegetation resembles the mixed and coniferous forests of the north. This cool and shaded area provides a perfect environment for hemlock, tamarack and cedar.

Area 7

Just past the Fanshawe cottages the trail enters a second small pine plantation. Notice how different this plantation is from the one in area 6. These healthy pines let in very little sunlight and cover the forest floor with needles. This has made it difficult for other plants to become established. The trail continues to wind its way down to the Wye Creek. This area is a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes. The mosquitoes can be very plentiful, especially in late spring and early summer. Protect yourself accordingly.

Area 8

Continuing through the final section of the lake trail you will find mature hardwood forest. Worth mentioning are the alien (non-native) plants that are found along all sections of the trail. Alien species can be very invasive and have no natural predators. They are able to out-compete native plants, reducing diversity and animal habitat. Species that are very common along the trail are buckthorn and garlic

mustard. Buckthorn is a small tree with small, oval, deep green leaves and one inch long thorns along its branches. Garlic mustard is a plant that smells like garlic when crushed between your fingers. When entering a large patch you can often smell the garlic without even touching the plant.

Area 9

Fanshawe Dam and Reservoir were one of the first major projects of the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA). Completed in 1952 at a cost of \$5 million, today it would cost more than \$100 million to build the dam. The structure was built to store flood waters and protect low-lying areas from floods such as the ones that inundated London West in 1883 and 1937. Most recently, the dam and reservoir prevented flooding in London in July 2000.

Looking below the dam in the summertime, you may catch a glimpse of the eastern spiny softshell turtle. The softshell is one of the rarest turtles in Canada, and has been classified as "threatened" by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada. This reptile is identified by its extremely flat, rubbery shell and long, snorkel-like nose. They may be seen basking on open sandy beaches, gravel bars, mud flats, river banks, or on large rocks in mid-stream. Softshells are frequently seen in the Thames River but are easily disturbed by human activities.

Area 10

Since the early days of European settlement in the London area, the Thames has been a popular spot for swimming, boating and fishing. The first supervised beach at Fanshawe opened in 1953 and the tent and trailer camp opened in 1955. Around Fanshawe Reservoir today you will find the Conservation Area's campground and day use area, Fanshawe Pioneer Village, Fanshawe Sugar Bush, Fanshawe Yacht Club, two golf courses, children's camps, and many other facilities. Fanshawe is also home to one of Canada's two National High Performance Rowing Centres. The Canadian women's rowing team is often seen practising their medal-winning skills on Fanshawe Lake.