



Thornton Bales Conservation Area

Old-growth Forest Walks in Ontario's Greenbelt

Descend through the forest canopy on the "99 steps" into an old-growth oak, ash and maple forest.

Water seeping from the north slope of the moraine helps sustain a rich understory of ferns, wild ginger, ground pine and other plants. Trails connecting to University of Toronto land at Jokers Hill offer many day-hike options, though you may want to use gps on your phone avoid getting turned around on the sometimes confusing trail network.



How to get there

By car: The closest parking is on 19th Sideroad (44.027, -79.519). University of Toronto trails also access the old-growth forest, it's a 40 minute hike from the Joker Hill Trailhead at Bathurst Street to Thornton Bales Conservation Area.

By public transit: York region transit Bus 57 takes you to the Joker Hill Trailhead off Bathurst St (44.041, -79.504). Or walk 35 minutes from the Newmarket GO Bus station to the Jokers Hill trailhead.

By bike: This conservation area is on the Greenbelt Cycle Route, a short ride from Newmarket.



Thousands of years ago a large section of the north slope of the Oak Ridges Moraine sloughed off in a massive landslide, just west of what is now Newmarket. No one knows why – it might have been caused by an earthquake, or by soil saturated with water and unstable after heavy rains. The result today is a precipitous drop into Thornton Bales Conservation Area and impressive views into the forest when the leaves are on, or over the surrounding landscape when the trees are bare. This forest has large old-growth oak, maple, ash, beech and butternut trees, but many are threatened by invasive species. Emerald ash borer, beech scale, and butternut canker are killing many trees in this forest. Invasive species are not an insurmountable problem - an important first step is preventing new ones from arriving and spreading (look up Tree-SMART Trade to learn more).

Learn more

Henry and Quinby, 2021. *Ontario's old-growth forests, 2nd edition.*

Henry, M., 2022 (expected publication). *Old-growth forest walks in Ontario's Greenbelt. Watch for the book in 2022.*

www.caryinstitute.org/science/tree-smart-trade

www.oldgrowth.ca

www.ancientforest.org



Possibility grows here.