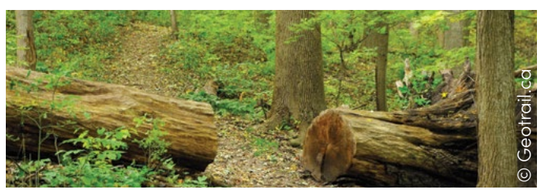
Royal Botanical Gardens CANADA

Trail Guide

Escarpment Properties

Part of the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve
Links to the Bruce and Waterfront trails



Hours

- RBG Centre – 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., late April to Thanksgiving; 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Thanksgiving to late April (680 Plains Rd.)
- Trailheads – 8 a.m. to dusk. Metered parking at trailhead lots. Parking is free to RBG members (display Parking Pass).
- Arboretum – 10 a.m. to dusk.; extra admission fees apply during spring bloom festivals and open hours may be extended.

Membership – Passport to Paradise

Membership is one of many ways to support RBG's sanctuaries.Nearly half of the operational funding of the Gardens is raised through memberships, donations and admissions. How much is a nature sanctuary in your backyard worth to you? Purchase your membership today and receive free parking at our trail heads.

Charitable registration #133500850 RR 0001
A private landowning agency providing public access to the environment.

RBG Centre, 680 Plains Road West
Burlington, ON L7T 4H4
905-527-1158 • www.rbg.ca

ALSO IN THIS 2023 MAP SERIES:
- Cootes Paradise
- Hendrie Valley

Escarpment Nature Sanctuaries

Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve is represented here by several properties forming a 110-hectare, three-kilometre ribbon along the Escarpment edge. RBG trails, and especially the Bruce Trail, link our local lands — collectively all these properties are a key part of the new Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System.

MAJOR ACCESS POINTS

Rock Chapel
Located near spectacular Borer's Falls, this is the main escarpment access point for this section of the Bruce Trail. The area is a collection of old field tablelands and forested, south-facing escarpment cliffs and talus slope. Numerous lookouts and views of Cootes Paradise dot the Bruce Trail as it tracks along the top edge of the Niagara Escarpment.

Patterson Road, Berry Tract
Located at Patterson Road and bisected by the Bruce Trail, the area forms the headwaters of Cootes Paradise's Hickory Brook. Limited access to the Bruce Trail and Cartwright Sanctuary is through RBG's Berry Tract property. Once pasture, the site includes old orchards and gullies cut through the clay soil by springs and runoff from the Escarpment.

Sydenham Road
Located at the western edge of Rock Chapel, the Sydenham Road pull-off is a City of Hamilton scenic view location.

What's in a Name?
Rock Chapel is named after a clapboard church built east of Borer's Falls in 1822. Adjacent property was turned over to the Gardens in 1942, after originally being set aside in the 1920s as a potential gravel quarry. Berry Tract is named for Alfred Berry who bequeathed this former farmland to the Gardens for conservation purposes in 1965.

Early European Residents
United Empire Loyalists settled Dundas and the first family to arrive, the Mordens, was granted land in the area. Morden House, located next to Borer's Falls, was built in the 1790s next to the creek that powered their sawmill. The community of Rock Chapel sprang up along the road near the mill — it once included a buggy works, butcher, blacksmith, two general stores and its namesake church.

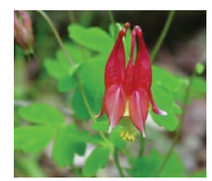
Vegetation and Microclimate
Its south-facing orientation gives Rock Chapel one of the warmest talus slopes along the Niagara Escarpment. Shallow soils, rock outcrops and numerous springs, create a diverse mixture of habitats that host a great variety of plants. Perhaps the best known are ancient White Cedars that cling to the face of the Borer's Creek gorge. The oldest of these germinated in 1601!

Habitat Restoration
Natural succession of old farmland has taken its course in the Berry Tract, led by trees like Hawthorne, Black Walnut and White Ash. Plantations of Black Locust and poplar were added in the 1970s. Former farm fields have actively converted to native plant species meadows

Trail Destinations (See map)

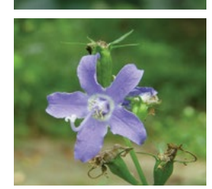
1. **Escarpment Edge Lookouts** — Following along the Escarpment edge, the many lookouts along the Bruce Trail reveal the last unbroken natural connection between Lake Ontario and the Escarpment. Much of this open space is part of the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System.
2. **Borer's Creek Gorge and the Cedars** — The impressive gorge has been carved by thousands of years of erosion. Old growth cedars were studied here in the 1980s/90s with the oldest being close to 400 years old.
3. **Borer's Falls** — Located next to Rock Chapel Road, this 15-metre-high curtain waterfall is one of more than 120 waterfalls found in Hamilton. Borer's Creek drains from Waterdown, winding its way to Cootes Paradise Marsh.
4. **Geology Exhibit** — Located 0.75 kilometre west of the parking lot on the Armstrong Trail, a 10-metre descent on a stair system takes you past labeled layers of escarpment rock formations.
5. **The Disappearing Brook** — At the end of Armstrong Trail a small brook emerges, or in fact reappears. It flows from the meadow above and disappears some 200 metres back from the Escarpment edge. This is a karst feature, formed when water dissolves limestone bedrock and creates underground passages.
6. **The Orchards** — At Berry Tract, a small orchard was planted in the 1930s. It is regenerating with native Ash, Hawthorne and Black Walnut trees. Deer frequent the area in autumn to eat the pears and apples, and use Red Cedar trees to rub the velvet off their antlers. Come take a hike in spring during blossom time!

Escarpment Flowers



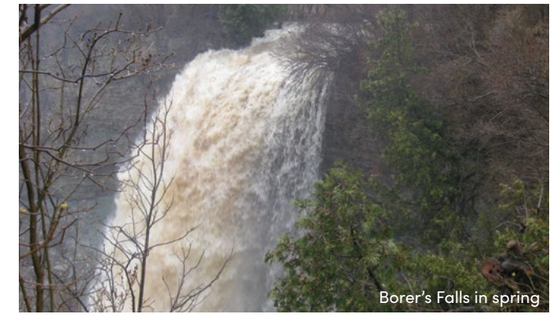
Wild Columbine
(Aquilegia canadensis)
This late-spring flower attracts pollinators like hummingbirds. The name comes from *aquilinum,* meaning eagle-like, as the spurs on the flower resemble the talons of an eagle.

Moonseed
(Menispermum canadense)
This climbing vine has distinctive maple-shaped leaves. The semi-toxic fruit of this species turns bright red as it ripens in the fall. The plant's name is derived from the moon-shaped seeds.



Tall Bellflower
(Campanula americana)
This late summer blooming plant has light blue, star-shaped flowers with a white ring at the center. The style, in the centre of the flower, is distinctively long and curves up at the tip.

Heart-leaved Aster
(Symphyotrichum cordifolium)
Typically found in woodland clearings or open habitats, this species flowers in the late summer and has heart-shaped basal leaves.



Borer's Falls in spring

Royal Botanical Gardens

Mission
We dedicate our expertise in horticulture, conservation, science and education to connect people, plants and place for the purpose of nurturing and preserving healthy growing life on our planet.

Canada's Biodiversity Hot Spot
Royal Botanical Gardens' 1,100 hectares is dominated by nature sanctuaries enveloping the western end of Lake Ontario. These form a Nodal Park within the Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve (UNESCO) and the heart of the Cootes to Escarpment Ecopark System. With more than 750 native plant species, 277 types of migratory birds, 37 mammal species, 14 reptile species, 9 amphibian species and 68 species of Lake Ontario fish, the area is an important contributor to ecosystems that span international borders.

Trail Conditions

The nature trails are classed as wilderness trails with surfaces that include packed earth, crushed stone, asphalt and boardwalks; some sections are steep and hilly. Trails are not plowed or sandy during the winter. During spring thaws and after rains earthen trails become muddy. Please take appropriate caution.

LIABILITY RBG assumes no responsibility for loss of or damage to property, personal injury or mishap. All activities are at the risk of the participant. Our parking lots are not monitored. Do not leave any valuables in your car.

Volunteer

Volunteers help us on our trails and in our natural lands in a wide variety of ways. If you're interested in learning more about our conservation, trail ambassadors, TrailWatchers or bird census teams, we'd love to hear from you. **rbg.ca/volunteer**

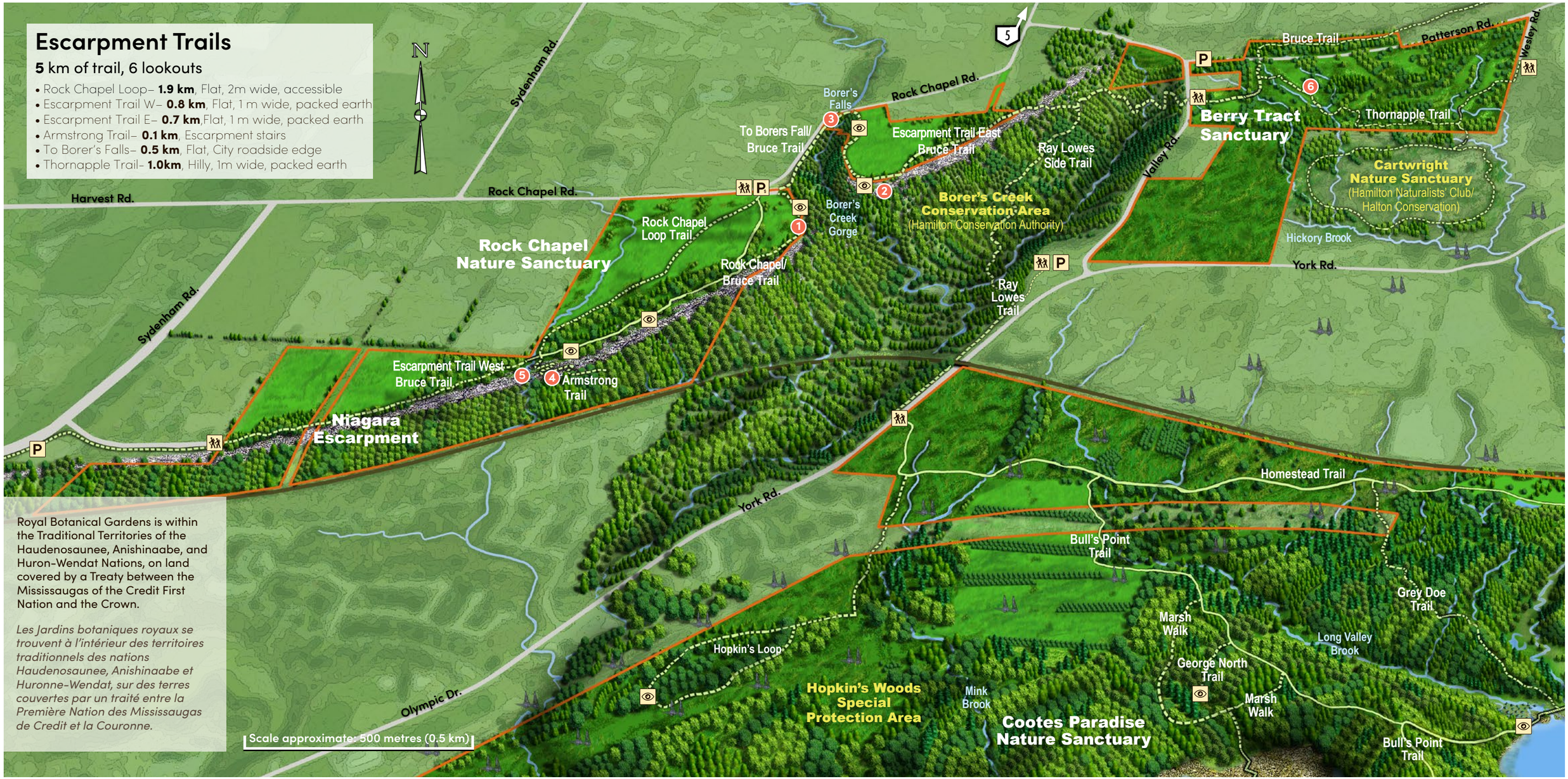
Learn More

Guided educational outings are offered year-round and include everything from wildflower walks to birdwatching and photography workshops. External groups **charging** for independently guided tours must register with RBG and are subject to our self-guided admission rate. For information call 905-527-1158, ext. 270.

Escarpment Trails

5 km of trail, 6 lookouts

- Rock Chapel Loop– **1.9 km**, Flat, 2m wide, accessible
- Escarpment Trail W– **0.8 km**, Flat, 1 m wide, packed earth
- Escarpment Trail E– **0.7 km**,Flat, 1 m wide, packed earth
- Armstrong Trail– **0.1 km**, Escarpment stairs
- To Borer's Falls– **0.5 km**, Flat, City roadside edge
- Thornapple Trail- **1.0km**, Hilly, 1m wide, packed earth



Royal Botanical Gardens is within the Traditional Territories of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, and Huron-Wendat Nations, on land covered by a Treaty between the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the Crown.

Les Jardins botaniques royaux se trouvent à l'intérieur des territoires traditionnels des nations Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe et Huronne-Wendat, sur des terres couvertes par un traité entre la Première Nation des Mississaugas de Credit et la Couronne.

MAP KEY
LÉGENDE

- RBG Properties / *Propriétés des JBR*
- Roads Routes
- Rail Lines / *Voies ferrées*
- Gravel or Paved Trails / *Sentiers en gravier ou revêtus*
- Dirt Trails / *Sentiers en terre battue*
- Boardwalks / *Promenades de bois*
- Trailhead / *Début de sentier*
- Lookout / *Belvédère*
- Parking / *Stationnement*
- Pay and Display Parking (free for RBG members displaying valid pass) / *Stationnement payer et afficher (gratuit pour les membres des JBR qui affichent leur laissez-passer en règle)*

Trail Code

These lands are pa rt of Canada's biodiversity hot spot, open to **passive recreation** — leave only footprints, take only pictures. Garbage receptacles located at trailheads.

Restrictions (per RBG's bylaws):

- Pets must remain leashed at all times
- Running/jogging and cycling are not permitted
- Motorized vehicles are not permitted
- Feeding the wildlife is not permitted
- Smoking is not permitted

Special Protection Areas

Though the property spans more than 1,100 hectares, urban encroachment has left few true sanctuaries for sensitive species. To ensure that all species have an opportunity to thrive, 20 per cent of the property is set aside as Special Protection Areas (SPA) closed to the public. There are observation points and interpretive signage adjacent to the SPAs to help visitors understand the significance of these unique spaces.

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AODA Note: Nature Trails are classed as Wilderness Trails. Trails defined as "hilly" have elevation changes of 20m with grades in sections of 20%. Trails are generally 2m wide expect for "Narrow" trails that are 1m wide. Trails have cross slopes of <5% for drainage were needed. Rock Chapel Loop Trail is ftat hard surfaced and accessible