The Landscape

Although you cannot see bedrock while travelling the river, it is interesting to note that the entire river valley is resting on sedimentary rock more than 1 million years old. This rock consists of sediments and shells of ancient marine animals deposited when the area was covered by warm, shallow seas. On top of the bedrock is a thick layer of material that has been deposited, shaped and reshaped countless times by the actions of glaciers, ice sheets and post-glacial lakes and dunes that have formed along the Nottawasaga River and its tributaries.

Here the river has cut a 25 m gorge through layers of sedimentary rock deposited in the post-glacial lakes created by the retreat of the Wisconsin ice sheet. The rapids in this area and just upstream are thought to have started as sandbars and bars along the ancient shorelines of these post-glacial lakes.

Two thousand years ago this area was part of the bottom of post-glacial Lake Algonquin. Gradually water levels dropped until even the Wasaga Beach area was 30 m above the level of Lake Algonquin. Then, 7,000 years ago, the sudden resurgence of the Wisconsin ice sheet caused glacial lake development, creating Lake Nipissing. At this stage the Nipissing Wetland existed as an inland extension of the lake. The area around the Village of Minesing was a island near the north-east shore. The name Minesing is, in fact, a native American word for island. Gradually lake levels again decreased and the area exists today as a 6,000 ha, internationally significant wetland.

In this area the Nottawasaga River has cut a deep gorge through the Edenvale Moraine. The moraine is made of materials deposited by the retreat of the Wisconsin ice sheet.

During the Lake Nipissing stage of post-glacial lake development, a baymouth bar was created in what is now Wasaga Beach. The baymouth bar resulted in a formation of a large lagoon that eventually drained and recharged in size to form the Jacks Lake basin. As lake levels rose again, wasaga Beach formed. At the mouth of the river, the baymouth bar retreat was captured by several creeks containing white cherry sap and dogwood-holly trees.

The Wasaga Beach area, because of glacial lake deposits, exhibits a strikingly formed landscape. The area contains a variety of vegetation communities, from forest to open prairie grasslands to open desert. Natural fires, blowouts and logging have contributed to this survival of this pattern for 4,000 years.

The Nottawasaga Wetlands are of international significance, home to a diverse array of wildlife. Practically side-by-side lie areas typical of the northern Great Lakes. Among the highlights include:

- One of the most extensive sites for pine Silver Maple stands in Ontario
- One of the very few sites in Ontario where swale prairie wetlands are found
- Several species of provincially rare plants
- Several species of breeding birds believed to be endangered in Ontario

Flora & Fauna

The NIVA and its partners work hard to maintain conservation lands for the enjoyment of all. Help us protect our wild places by following these simple rules:

- Pack out your litter or dispose of it where facilities exist.
- Observe all signs regarding private property.
- Camp only at designated camp sites.
- Set campfires only at designated locations. Do not bring in your own firewood, as this can lead to the spread of invasive species.
- When portaging, stay on existing trails and leave no trace of your passage behind.

Exploring the Nottawasaga Valley by Water — Points of Interest

The main branch of the Nottawasaga River is 121 km long, dropping 300 m from its source to its mouth. The river drains almost 3,000 km² of land in the Nottawasaga Valley. The river remains passable from spring to fall, although the section from the Essa Canoe Access down to Essa Township may require some portaging and tiring during low water levels. During the summer months, paddlers are encouraged to check with the NVCA about water levels and the best starting point along the river.

The canoe route starts near the hamlet of Nicolson on Hwy 89 and takes you some 75 km downstream to Portage. The canoe route offers three distinctive canoeing opportunities, each being suitable as a day trip. It is possible to travel the entire route at a comfortable pace in two or three days.

Nicolson to Angus 22.5 km

This longest portion of the route offers several highlights including a series of small rapids extending from just south of Angas Hollow to a series of small rapids just downstream of Jack’s Lake, and the largest group of parabolic sand dunes in the province. The route ends at historic Schooner Town and Nancery Island, as well as one of the world’s longest fresh water beaches, Wasaga Beach.

Angus to Edenvale 19 km

This portion of the route offers several highlights including a series of small rapids just downstream of Jack’s Lake, and the largest group of parabolic sand dunes in the province. The route ends at historic Schooner Town and Nancery Island, as well as one of the world’s longest fresh water beaches, Wasaga Beach.

Edenvale to Wasaga Beach 23.5 km

This portion of the route offers several highlights including Jack’s Lake, a popular fishing spot, a series of small rapids just downstream of Jack’s Lake, and the largest group of parabolic sand dunes in the province. The route ends at historic Schooner Town and Nancery Island, as well as one of the world’s longest fresh water beaches, Wasaga Beach.

Canoes in the Minesing Wetlands

Wetland is an aquatic habitat that occurs on the surface of the land. Wetlands are flooded periodically with water, and may be composed of a variety of aquatic plants and animals. Wetlands are important because they provide habitat for a variety of plants and animals, and they help to maintain water quality. Wetlands also serve as natural filters, helping to remove pollutants from water before it enters other bodies of water.

Canoes are a popular way to explore the Minesing Wetlands. The wetlands are home to a variety of plants and animals, and can be explored by canoe. Paddlers are encouraged to check with the NVCA about water levels and the best starting point along the river.

Safety Tips

- Know how to swim.
- Wear your life jacket/PFD at all times.
- Know the symptoms and treatment for hypothermia, one of the leading causes of canoeing deaths.
- Be prepared. Carry an extra paddle and PFD, first aid kit, the NIVA’s basic survival guide, waterproof flashlight, good quality map of the area and compass. Dry clothes and a change of dry food and water are always a good idea.
- Let at least one responsible person know where you are going and when you are expected to return.
- Take care around rapids, especially if you are new to paddling.
- Think twice before paddling the Nottawasaga in the spring. High water levels, cold temperatures, strong currents and floating debris are common, and making paddling unpredictable.
- Watch for deadheads (partially submerged logs), which are common along the paddling route.
- Use caution when you enter or leave your boat, as logs and high muddy banks are common along the Nottawasaga.
- Note that winds can generate large waves quickly on open water such as Jack’s Lake. Stay close to shore in such situations.

Touring the Nottawasaga River

The Nottawasaga River is a popular destination for canoeists. The river is a class III river, with some class IV rapids, and is considered to be a “wild” river. The river is also home to a variety of fish including walleye, northern pike, white perch, and rainbow trout. Over 200 species of birds have also been sighted in the Minesing Wetlands.

The Nottawasaga River is also home to a variety of mammals including whitetail deer, black bears, and black bears. Although rare, black bears have been sighted in the Nottawasaga Wetlands. The river also serves as a transportation route for a variety of waterfowl including mallards, wood ducks, and Canada geese.

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Points of Interest

Landscape
- Gorge and Rapids: Bottom part of Post-Glacial Lake Algonquin Gorge through Eden vale Moraine
- Wasiaga Beach Spit
- Flora & Fauna: Linear Vegetation Pattern, Minesing Wetlands
- Private Lands: Pine Forest Plantation
- History:
  - Schooner Town
  - Glengarry Landing
  - Nancy Island Historic Site
  - Willow Creek Canoe Route
  - The Nine Mile Portage
  - Wasaga Beach
  - Angus Nicolston

Legend
- Canoe Access/Egress
- Canoe Camping Only
- Rapids
- Portage
- Wildlife Viewing Platform
- Wetlands
- Woodlands

The safety tips provided on this map are for information purposes only. Paddling by canoe, kayak or other watercraft has by its very nature some element of risk. Care and good judgement must be used at all times.

All content on this map are provided for information purposes only. While the NVCA attempts to obtain information from reliable sources, it cannot assume liability for any inaccuracies contained herein.

Land Access Fees
- There is a parking fee of $6.50 per vehicle at conservation areas managed by NVCA, payable by cellphone, online and in-person (during business hours at NVCA Administration Office).
- Annual parking passes and hunting passes are available.
- Contact the NVCA office or visit nvca.on.ca for details.