

# Part 3 - Recreation: Thames River Watershed

Principal Author:  
**Andrea Quenneville, B.A.**



# Recreation

The Thames River system supports a great diversity of recreational activities. Through either direct or indirect associations with the river, recreational experiences are enhanced. This section of the study describes the outstanding recreational values of the Thames River system under the general guidelines prescribed by the Canadian Heritage Rivers Board.

The diversity of recreational activities along the Thames is, in itself, a significant feature. The provision of “something for everyone” is a notable quality. Opportunities for those interested in history, nature, hiking, angling, boating, canoeing, camping and picnicking are available along the Thames River and its major tributaries. This diversity of activities highlights the strong connection between recreation and the natural and human heritage values of the Thames River.

The natural features of the river, its valley, and wildlife, greatly add to the enjoyment of recreational activities. The reservoirs, designed primarily for flood control, provide additional opportunities for recreation. There is also an exciting historical element to recreation in the watershed. The sporting and leisure pursuits of early settlers have formed strong roots for many of today’s clubs and facilities. There is also a strong interest in the cultural/human history of the watershed as demonstrated by numerous military re-enactments and recreated villages. Historical sites, plaques and museums provide other avenues to explore the human heritage of the Thames.

## **Methodology**

A Recreation Background Studies Subcommittee was formed to develop a recreation framework and to assist in the research. The seven themes that evolved are: Boating, Fishing and Hunting, Other Sports, Trails and Corridors, Parklands and Campgrounds, Nature Appreciation, and Human Heritage Appreciation.

Data for this study were collected from a number of sources including published and unpublished works. Trail guides, pamphlets, university theses, and personal interviews with local enthusiasts contributed a significant amount of information.

# Chapter 21

## Boating

The most significant recreational opportunity directly related to the Thames River is boating. Although not entirely navigable, long stretches of the river have been utilized for boating since the time of the earliest Aboriginal settlements. No longer relied upon solely for transportation, river travellers of today take to their watercraft for the recreational opportunities the river and reservoirs provide. Some of the most popular forms of boating on the Thames River include rowing, canoeing and kayaking, cruising, sailing and windsurfing. This chapter describes boating activities on the Thames River system from an historical and modern perspective.

### 21.1 History

Recreational boating became popular in the mid-1800s, coinciding with an increase in leisure time. A “frenzy” of boating activity was occurring along the entire length of the Thames River at this time (Day, 1977, 129). Rowing, canoeing and steamship touring were the most common forms of recreational boating. Hundreds of people would routinely board steamships to enjoy a leisurely journey along the meandering river.

Londoners were particularly fond of rowing; men and women alike took part in rowing and rowing competitions. These were extremely popular, providing an exciting spectacle for countless spectators who lined the banks. (Day, 1977, 246). The London Rowing Club, established in 1870, brought together some of the area’s most competitive rowing athletes. World class oarsman Ned Hanlan made appearances in communities along the Thames River and provided demonstrations of his rowing prowess. Hanlan’s presence did much to bolster community pride and fuel the interest in rowing (Day, 1977, 369). Canoeing was also experiencing a rise in popularity and would gain the attention of a number of would-be rowers. Regattas held on the Avon River in Stratford were enjoyed by men and women of all ages (see Figure 21.1). In fact, the shift from rowing to canoeing was so great that in Chatham the near disappearance of rowing is attributed to the rise in popularity of canoeing (Day, 1977, 438).

Figure 21.1 Regatta in Stratford, 1865.



Source: Lennon, 1985, 24

By the turn of the century, the popularity of steamship travel had faded due, in part, to competition with stage coaches and railway trolleys. A number of accidents on the waters of the Thames also contributed to the disappearance of steamships. London’s “Victoria Day Disaster” of 1881 took the lives of close to 150 passengers on the steamship *Victoria*. It is believed that passengers on board the overcrowded *Victoria* all shifted to one side to watch a passing sculler then, as the boat tipped, rushed back to the other side in an effort to level the ship. The ship capsized into the Thames and the boiler came crashing down. A plaque now stands along the bike path in Greenway Park in London, commemorating the event.

### 21.2 Rowing

There is a long, strong tradition of rowing on the Thames River, especially in London. Rowers from the University of Western Ontario gained national recognition for their impressive display at the Olympic trials in 1968. By the early 1970s, Western’s rowing team had taken up permanent residence at Fanshawe Lake. A second centre, the Joe McManus Canoeing and Rowing Facility, was constructed along the Thames just upstream of Springbank Dam in 1973. It continues to be a very popular rowing centre for the community.

In 1986, Rowing Canada Aviron announced that London would be the site of the women’s High Performance Rowing Centre, one of only two training centres in Canada for national and Olympic athletes. Gold medalists Marnie McBean, Kathleen Heddle, and Silken Laumann trained at this facility. The High Performance Rowing Centres in London and Victoria, British Columbia, are credited with

changing the face of rowing in Canada (Murphy, pers. comm.). The growing achievements of the Canadian rowing team have raised the sport to a level unequalled since the 1880s.

The rowing centres host numerous university, local, provincial, national and international competitions (see Figure 21.2). One such event was the Commonwealth Rowing Championships, held in 1994, and the Ontario Rowing Championships in 1997; both attracted international attention and thousands of spectators. In addition, the London High Performance Rowing Centre has several future events scheduled, including the Canada Summer Games for the year 2001 (Murphy, pers. comm.).

**Figure 21.2** Rowing Regatta at Fanshawe Lake



Photo: UTRCA

In Woodstock, rowing activity is centred on Pittock Lake, where the club house and launching facilities are located. The club provides instruction, organizes competition and equips rowers with the skills necessary to advance to higher levels of competition (Goodall, pers. comm.).

### 21.3 Canoeing and Kayaking

“One of the greatest gifts of the Native people was the canoe” (Zeigler, 1988, 224). Since the time when Aboriginal settlers made their homes along the Thames, the canoe has been a much relied upon means of travel. It opened up new worlds and became a fixture on the Thames River.

Canoe travel has since evolved into a recreational pastime. The Thames River provides an excellent opportunity for canoeists and kayakers alike, offering more than 300 km of navigable river. From St. Marys along the North Branch and Woodstock along the South Branch, to the mouth of the river at Lake St. Clair, the Thames provides a scenic journey through a diverse landscape of forests and fields. Above Delaware, there are a number of boulder rapids which create exciting paddling conditions, especially in the spring (see Figure 21.3). In contrast, the lower portion of the Thames is quite flat with few obstacles.

**Figure 21.3** Canoeing the rapids on the South Branch



Photo: Henry Leparskas

Due to the extreme flow variations, especially in the upper river (see Natural Heritage 2.4), most of the paddling on the Thames River occurs in the spring and fall. However, a small dam at Springbank Park in London enables canoeists from the nearby London Canoe Club (Joe McManus Canoeing and Rowing Facility) to enjoy paddling throughout the summer. The reservoirs at all of the conservation areas also provide excellent paddling conditions throughout most of the year. The lower river generally has more water and can be paddled from spring to fall.

Canoeists and kayakers often paddle specific routes or stretches of the river. These stretches are described and mapped in pamphlets entitled *The Upper Thames River Canoe Routes and Paddling Portraits of Nature: Canoe the Lower Thames River*. Some of the popular routes are described in Table 21.1. Depending on flow and the number of boulders, paddling the Thames can be quite easy and relaxing (see Figure 21.4) or quite challenging. Numerous access points along the river enable canoeists to choose any length of trip.

**Table 21.1 Some of the Popular Canoe Routes on the Thames River and its branches**

Route	Watercourse	Distance	Description
St. Marys to Fanshawe Lake	North Branch	30 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- very scenic, tree-lined, rolling valley</li> <li>- some shallow rapids (water can be very low in summer)</li> </ul>
Fanshawe Dam to London Canoe Club (or Springbank Dam)	North Branch and Thames	21 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- mostly tree-lined through the city</li> <li>- several river-side parks for breaks and picnicking</li> <li>- sets of rapids encountered</li> </ul>
Springbank Dam to Delaware	Thames River	19 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- river meanders through forest and sandy bluffs</li> <li>- water flow is usually good, making paddling easy (see Figure 21.4) but there are several shallow rapids</li> </ul>
Pittock Dam to Putnam	South Branch	20 km	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- river is narrow and tree-lined, often with fallen willows</li> <li>- glimpses of farm fields</li> <li>- several boulder rapids, best travelled in spring as above</li> </ul>
Putnam to Dorchester	South Branch	7 km	
Delaware to Lake St. Clair	Thames River	174 km in 15-20 km stretches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 6-8 days to canoe entire route</li> <li>- often paddled in 15-20 km stretches (bridges cross the river every 6-10 km)</li> <li>- upper portion has steep banks and is tree-lined with pools, shoals and occasional rapids</li> <li>- lower portion of river is broad flat and dyked</li> </ul>

**Figure 21.4 Easy paddling on the North Branch**

Photo: Henry Leparskas

Due to the wide appeal of canoeing, canoe clubs have formed in Stratford, Woodstock, London and Chatham. The London Canoe Club is the largest canoe club in North America with approximately 1500 individual members. These clubs, many of which have been in existence for a number of decades, provide outdoor enthusiasts with the skills necessary to enjoy their paddling experience, whether it be in a canoe or kayak. They also organize several guided outings on the Thames and beyond, host a variety of canoe races and take an active role in many of the festivities along the river (e.g. canoe ballet demonstration at the Canada Day celebrations in Harris Park, London). Voyageur canoe races are becoming increasingly popular. The Chatham and London clubs have built their own North Canoes and participate in events throughout southern Ontario and Michigan.

## 21.4 Dragon Boat Festivals

Dragon Boat Festivals have been held in Stratford and London since the early 1990s. The festival is centred around an ancient myth about a man seeking the attention of his king (Shaw, pers. comm.). Celebrated around the world, the feature attraction of these festivals are the Dragon Boat Races. Amateur local teams compete with others from communities all over southern Ontario. More competitive teams also race. The festivals held in London and Stratford have been an overwhelming success. In an effort to accommodate the rising popularity, the 1997 Festival in London was moved from Greenway Park on the Thames to Fanshawe Lake (see Figure 21.5) and Stratford organizers have extended the event from one day to two days.

**Figure 21.5 Dragon Boat Festival, 1997, Fanshawe Conservation Area**

Photo: Cathy Quinlan

## 21.5 Cruising

Many types of boats cruise the waters of the Thames River including passenger cruise lines, pleasure craft, power boats, yachts, and sailboats.

In Stratford, a line of cruising vessels, named the Juliet, have been cruising up and down the Avon River since 1916. Today, the Juliet III offers passenger cruises from May to late September. The vessel, which can carry 20 passengers at a time, cruises approximately 1.5 kilometres up river past the Tom Patterson and Festival Theatres. Approximately 5,000 to 6,000 passengers board the Juliet III each year, many of them are visitors to the Stratford Festival or residents of nearby communities.

In London, passengers board The London Princess at the docks in Springbank Park. With room for up to 40 passengers, the vessel cruises a couple of kilometres up river to Greenway Park. The season, from late May to early October, is dependent on the operation of the Springbank Dam which raises water levels. Located within the most visited park in the city, The London Princess carries hundreds of passengers each season for a scenic cruise of the river (Crispin, pers. comm.).

Numerous private vessels travel from the mouth of the river to the serviced docks in the heart of Chatham (see Figure 21.6). Chatham has constructed nearly 915 metres of docking, providing ample room along the banks of the Thames River for both power boats and sailing vessels (Chatham City Docks - Pamphlet). The 30 km section of river from Chatham to Lighthouse Cove on Lake St. Clair has been a significant passageway for travel since the 1830s (Day, 1977, 128). Today this lower portion of the river is used almost exclusively by the thousands of recreational boaters who travel up the Thames River each year from as far away as Michigan and other American states which border the Great Lakes. There are several large marinas at Lighthouse Cove that cater to the boating public.

Sailing is another popular form of boating in this region. A number of sailing and yacht clubs have developed including the Fanshawe Yacht Club at Fanshawe Conservation Area and the Oxford Sailing Club at Pittock Conserva-

Figure 21.6 Dockside in Chatham



Photo: Andrea Quenneville

tion Area, where the reservoirs provide the consistent water depth needed. These clubs provide docking facilities and instruction, and host local regattas.

## 21.6 Windsurfing

The Tornado Windsurfing Club, established in 1977 at Pittock Lake, is the oldest boardsailing club in Canada (Coyle, pers. comm.). The club provides lessons and often hosts local regattas. Wildwood reservoir is also an extremely popular body of water for windsurfers. Fanshawe reservoir is somewhat less popular due to the inconsistent wind conditions. On a blustery summer day one can see dozens of colourful sails cruising on the reservoirs (see Figure 21.7).

Figure 21.7 Windsurfing at Wildwood Reservoir



Photo: London Free Press

## Summary

The Thames River system is recognized for the significant recreational opportunities it has provided for boaters for more than a century. The Thames has developed a reputation as a national centre for rowing and a very popular venue for canoeing, cruising, sailing and windsurfing. It is home to one of Canada's largest canoe clubs and the oldest windsurfing club.

# Chapter 22

## Fishing and Hunting

The Thames River system provides diverse habitats for a wide variety of fish and game animals (see Natural Heritage 6.0). As a result, the river is a year round centre of activity for both anglers and hunters. This chapter discusses the significant opportunities for anglers and hunters along the Thames River system.

### 22.1 History

The abundance of fish and prey animals along the Thames was a critical factor in drawing early settlement to the area. Realizing the wealth of natural resources the Thames could provide, many Aboriginal people settled close to the river (see First Nations 17.0 - 20.0).

Increased hunting and fishing pressure from the influx of European settlers resulted in the need for regulation (Day, 1977, 91-2). In order to maintain the quality and the quantity of the fish and game population, a number of restrictions were legislated. This was an attempt to guarantee the future of fishing and hunting along the Thames.

In the mid-1800s, industrialization and improvements in farming decreased the reliance on fish and game for sustenance. However, fishing and hunting traditions remained strong and today they are favourite recreational pastimes for many.

### 22.2 Fishing

Fishing is a very popular recreational activity throughout Ontario and the Thames River is no exception. Unlike the remote fishing communities of northern Ontario, the Thames River is easily accessible to thousands of local residents. The Canada Land Inventory has identified opportunities for angling or viewing sport fish along the entire length of the river.

Anglers enjoy the beauty of the river valley and the accessibility to favourite fishing spots (see Figure 22.1). Public access platforms have been constructed at Greenway and Harris Parks in London. Thames River anglers frequently report “good” fishing, in terms of the number and species of fish caught (Wilson and Pfaff, 1991, 64). Migratory patterns, changes in water levels, pools and riffles, and the deeper areas at the base of dams provide a number of angling opportunities along the river.

Figure 22.1 Fishing on the North Branch

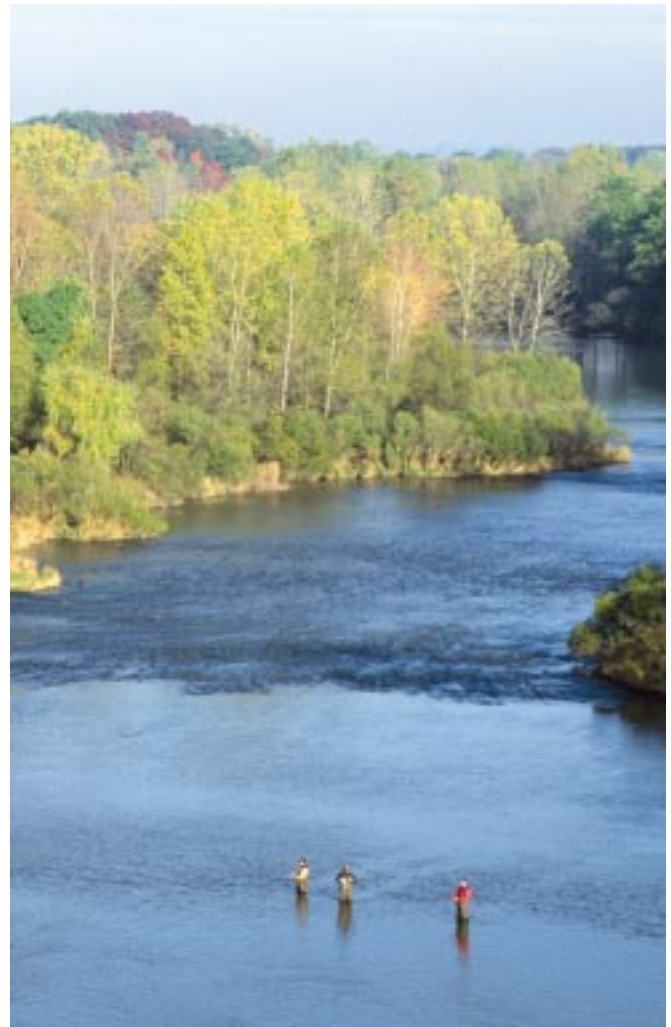


Photo: UTRCA

Thames River anglers are as diverse as the many species found within the system. Individual interests, customs and abilities dictate the species most frequently sought. Table 22.1 lists 12 of the commonly sought fish. Ice fishing, especially for Walleye, is also popular amongst Thames River anglers (Fairburn, pers. comm.). Favourite locations include the mouth of the Thames and the reservoirs at Wildwood, Fanshawe and Pittcock Conservation Areas.

Table 22.1 - Fish Commonly Sought By Thames River Anglers

- |                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| • Largemouth Bass | • Pumpkinseed   |
| • Smallmouth Bass | • Carp          |
| • Rock Bass       | • White Sucker  |
| • Yellow Perch    | • Walleye       |
| • Northern Pike   | • Bullhead      |
| • Trout           | • Black Crappie |

### 22.21 Fish Habitat Protection, Maintenance and Development

Many Thames River anglers are interested in the protection, maintenance and development of the fishery. As a result, a number of local clubs have formed to address issues such as access development, fish habitat restoration and fisheries enhancement. These clubs play a very important role in maintaining the quality of angling experiences along the Thames, and fundraising for appropriate projects. Their mandates focus on raising public awareness, particularly among the youth, in regards to the fishing opportunities throughout the Thames River system. Many of these organizations work in partnership with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the local conservation authorities.

Several projects have been initiated to protect and enhance the sport fishery. For example, in 1988-90, pre-spawning Walleye were transferred from the Thames River near Jeannettes Creek to the North Branch upstream of Fanshawe Dam. Tracking results indicate that the transferred Walleye are abundant and growing quite well, proving that the Thames River still provides suitable habitat for Walleye. It also helped dispel some of the concerns related to water quality, particularly in the Fanshawe Reservoir.

There are a number of on-going habitat improvement projects as well. For example, on-going maintenance and rehabilitation work is occurring along the Dorchester Swamp Creek. This project involved clearing the spawning bed for Brook Trout. The population of the trout have increased as a result of this work (Fairburn, pers. comm.). Also, Rainbow Trout have been maintained in the river by the hatchery at Komoka Creek.

### 22.3 Hunting

Hunting and trapping take place, to a limited degree, within the Thames River watershed in woodlots, ravines and floodplains, primarily on privately owned land. Some of the most commonly sought birds and mammals are listed in Table 22.2. They provide satisfying hunting experiences for many residents of the Thames River watershed (Fairburn, pers. comm.).

In general, hunting is not permitted on public lands, but controlled deer hunts do occur at specific location under the regulations of the Ministry of Natural Resources. At Wildwood Conservation Area, for example, White-tailed Deer are hunted during specified times to control their numbers.

Table 22.2 Commonly Sought Game within the Thames River Watershed

BIRDS	MAMMALS
• Ring-Necked Pheasant	• Raccoon
• Wild Turkey	• Striped Skunk
• Ruffed Grouse	• Muskrat
• American Woodcock	• Red Fox
• Variety of Waterfowl	• Coyote
	• Eastern Cottontail
	• White-tailed Deer

#### 22.3.1 Hunting: Habitat Protection, Maintenance and Development

Wild Turkey is being successfully re-introduced to a number of areas within the Thames River watershed. After disappearing from the Ontario landscape in the early 1900s, this upland game bird is once again sustaining itself. The efforts of the Ministry of Natural Resources, in partnership with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), have been key to the success of this re-introduction program.

Progress is also underway in the planned re-introduction of the Bobwhite. Although this quail has not disappeared completely from the landscape, the numbers are presently too low to sustain hunting (Fairburn, pers. comm.).

#### Summary

**The Thames River has supported a strong fishing culture dating back to the time of the earliest human settlements. Its accessibility and species richness draw many anglers to the river today. Hunting also has a long history, and is still practised at a moderate level on private lands. Fishing and hunting clubs have rallied to protect and enhance this resource in the watershed.**

# Chapter 23

## Other Sports

The Thames River system has long been a gathering place for recreation. A number of sports take place in close proximity to the river or within the floodplain including baseball, swimming, cross country skiing, lawn bowling, and golfing. This chapter highlights the numerous sports which have been and are currently played within the floodplain of the Thames River system.

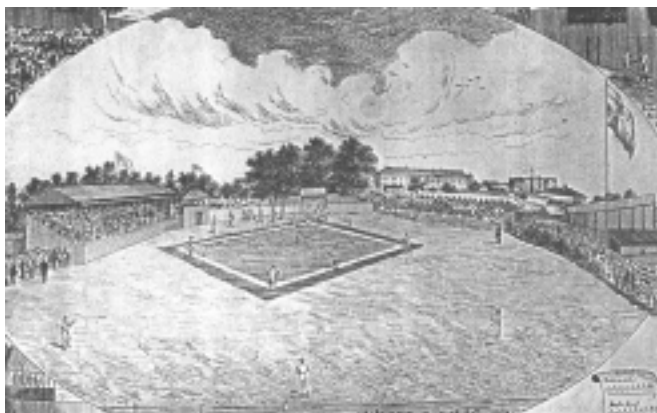
### 23.1 History

From a sports perspective, the Thames River was many things to many people. It provided a travel route for teams, water for irrigating manicured fairways, an ice surface for skating and curling, and a beautiful backdrop for many other activities.

It is believed that the first game of baseball was played in 1838 next to the South Branch in the Village of Beachville. It was part of the festivities held to commemorate the government's victory in the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837 (Armstrong, 1986). From here, baseball's popularity grew and spread across North America.

The London Tecumseh's ball team, established in 1868, fuelled the interest in London. These North American minor league professional champions of 1877 hosted teams in the newly constructed Tecumseh Park (see Figure 23.1). Renamed Labatt Park in 1936, it is London's oldest existing sports facility and is believed to be the oldest baseball grounds in continuous use in North America. The close proximity to the river allowed teams and spectators to travel to London to be a part of the action. Often, rowing competitions were held prior to ball games, thereby increas-

**Figure 23.1** Sketch of Championship Baseball Game in Tecumseh Park (Labatt Park) in 1877



Source: Armstrong, 1986

ing the popularity of both sports (Murphy, pers. comm.). Baseball continues to thrive in London due, in part, to its strong heritage.

Lawn bowling was another popular form of recreation centred on the river-side lands. Elitist groups from communities such as Stratford, Mitchell, London, and Chatham formed lawn bowling clubs. Lawn bowling had a certain appeal because of the low level of physical exertion required (Day, 1977, 464).

Swimming was also popular in the 19th century. Public swimming holes, such as the Old Grove in Stratford, were a centre for activity that resulted in the construction of a number of bath houses (see Figure 23.2). By the 1920s, increased restrictions on bathing activities as well as deteriorating water quality led to a reduction in the popularity of swimming in the river (Leitch, 1980, 140).

**Figure 23.2** Swimmers at bath house, Avon River, Stratford



Source: Lennon, 1985, 20

### 23.2 Winter Sports

In winter, the frozen river provided people with new opportunities for recreation. The influence of the Scottish immigrants resulted in the rising popularity of curling on the river (Wilson, 1981, 45). The first curling match in western

**Figure 23.3** Skating on the Avon River



Source: Lennon, 1985, 4

Ontario is believed to have taken place on the South Branch near the present location of the Pittock Dam in Woodstock (A Walk A Day, Pamphlet).

Skating on the river was also a fashionable recreational pastime before the advent of artificial ice surfaces. When the river froze everyone took advantage of the opportunity to spend long days skating on the river and its tributaries (see Figure 23.3). In Stratford, skaters would take shelter from the cold in the numerous bath houses along the banks of the Avon River (Leitch, 1980, 140).

Today, the river seldom freezes deep enough for skating or curling. Cross country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling are now popular activities which take place on the lands near the river.

In many Conservation Areas and parks, hiking trails and dirt roads are transformed into cross country ski trails for the winter. Wildwood and Fanshawe Conservation Areas are popular skiing destinations, as people are drawn by the long network of groomed, rolling trails and the warm-up visitor centres. Many river-side golf courses permit skiing as well. Table 23.1 lists some of the most frequently visited areas for cross country skiing near the Thames River. There are fewer opportunities in the lower watershed since there is seldom reliable snow cover in the “banana belt”.

When snowfall permits, snowmobiling along the river environs is another popular winter pastime. Much of this activity occurs on private land, as motorized vehicles are often prohibited on public property.

**Table 23.1 - Popular Areas for Cross Country Skiing**

- Wildwood Conservation Area
- Fanshawe Conservation Area
- Pittock Conservation Area
- Longwoods Conservation Area
- Thames Grove Conservation Area (Chatham)
- Avon Trail
- Thames Valley Trail
- Nordic Ski Touring Centre - Delaware
- Komoka Provincial Park
- T.J. Dolan Natural Area (Stratford)

### 23.3 Swimming

Unlike the popular swimming activities which took place along the river near the turn of the century, there are limited opportunities today. This is due, in part, to water quality concerns resulting from pollution from farming, industry and inadequate septic systems (see Human Heritage 15.2.4).

Today, swimming is centred primarily around the reservoirs at Wildwood, Fanshawe and Pittock Conservation Areas. They are popular destinations for many people seeking the beach-setting that the reservoirs provide. Fanshawe reservoir contains an experimental ultra-violet

light disinfection system. A swimming zone is curtained off from the rest of the reservoir and the water within is pumped into a chamber where it passes under UV lights which kill bacteria and other organisms. It has proven quite successful and the beach is rarely closed.

### 23.4 Shoreline Activities

Conservation authority regulations limit many types of development within the floodplain. However, recreational facilities such as golf courses and parks are permitted since they generally do not include buildings. Golf courses are drawn to the floodplain because of the scenic value of the river, the rolling nature of the valley and banks, and the availability of water for irrigation. There about 15 golf courses along the Thames River and its tributaries, including eight in London alone (see Table 23.2).

Many of the historic activities described earlier, such as lawn bowling and baseball, still go on today. There are also a number of river-side parks which provide facilities for tennis and soccer.

**Table 23.2 Golf Courses Along the Thames River System**

#### LONDON:

- North London Golf Centre
- Sunningdale Country Club
- Forest City National Golf Club
- Fanshawe Golf Club
- Thames Valley Golf Course
- London Hunt and Country Club
- East Park Golf Gardens
- River Road Golf Course

#### OTHERS:

- Dorchester Golf and Country Club
- Ingersoll Golf and Country Club
- Stratford Country Club Golf Course
- Mitchell Golf Course
- St. Marys Golf Course
- River Valley Golf Course (Thorndale)
- Maple City Golf and Country Club (Chatham)
- Indian Creek Golf Course (Chatham)

### Summary

**The Thames River system has supported and continues to support a wide variety of sporting activities. The floodplain is heavily used for cross-country skiing, golf, lawn bowling, baseball, tennis, and soccer.**

# Chapter 24

## Trails and Corridors

The diverse landscape surrounding the Thames River has created an ideal setting for the development of trails and corridors. Trails through wooded uplands and wetlands, urban centres and parklands appeal to fitness and nature enthusiasts alike. This chapter describes the significant opportunity for hiking on the trails and corridors within the watershed.

### 24.1 The Avon Trail

Land clearing for the Avon Trail was completed in 1976. The trail is about 100 km long and connects with the Thames Valley Trail in St. Marys and the Grand Valley Trail in Conestogo (see Figure 24.1).

The Avon Trail originates in St. Marys and travels in an eastward direction to Conestogo. Although not entirely located along the banks of the Avon River, the Avon Trail weaves through woodlands, rolling hills and, at times, follows the path of small rivers and streams (Avon Trail Guide). The agricultural landscape is a dominant feature as a large portion of the trail crosses privately owned farm land (Avon Trail Guide).

Southeast of the Town of St. Marys, the trail crosses Wildwood Conservation Area where it follows a portion of an 18 km loop trail maintained by the Conservation Area. Approximately 40 km from its origin, the trail crosses over the Avon River, following it for approximately 4 km before heading northeast to Conestogo. At the Avon River crossing, a side trail leads hikers into the heart of Stratford, past a number of landmarks. It borders the Avon River and passes through the extensive park system and the T.J. Dolan Natural Area (Fisher, pers. comm.). Unfortunately there are no records kept on the number of users.

### 24.2 Thames Valley Trail

The Thames Valley Trail (TVT) is the longest continuous trail in the watershed. The clearing and construction of trails began in the early 1970s and by 1976 the trail extended from London to St. Marys, along the North Branch River (see Figure 24.1). In 1995, the Elgin Trail was linked to the Thames Valley Trail making it possible to hike from Port Stanley on Lake Erie, through London to St. Marys, and then onto the Grand Valley Trail via the Avon Trail (see Figure 24.1). The success of this effort was, in part, due to the “community-minded landowners” who allowed trail

development to occur on their riverfront properties without forfeiting their ownership (Thames Valley Trail Association, 1996, 3). Approximately one third of the land that the TVT crosses is privately owned. Efforts to establish partnerships with private landowners continue in an attempt to increase the network of trails (Stenhouse, pers. comm.).

Developed primarily along the south bank of the Thames River, the Thames Valley Trail extends 109 km from the Middlesex-Elgin County line in the west, to St. Marys on the North Branch. The TVT travels through deciduous forests (see Figure 24.2), along agricultural fields and, occasionally, along rural roads. The northern portion of the trail traverses deeply carved river valleys and little bridges have been built to keep hikers out of the streams (Thames Valley Trail Association, 1996, 4). The trail passes through Fanshawe Conservation Area, where there are beautiful vistas of Fanshawe Lake from atop the steep banks. In the City of London, the TVT merges with paved, multi-use pathways that flank the river. Downstream of London, the trail passes through Komoka Provincial Park where hikers can walk within a few feet from the river on the floodplain or get spectacular views from atop the steep bluffs. The southerly part of the trail passes through low lying agricultural lands towards Delaware.

Figure 24.2 Hikers on the Thames Valley Trail



Photo: UTRCA

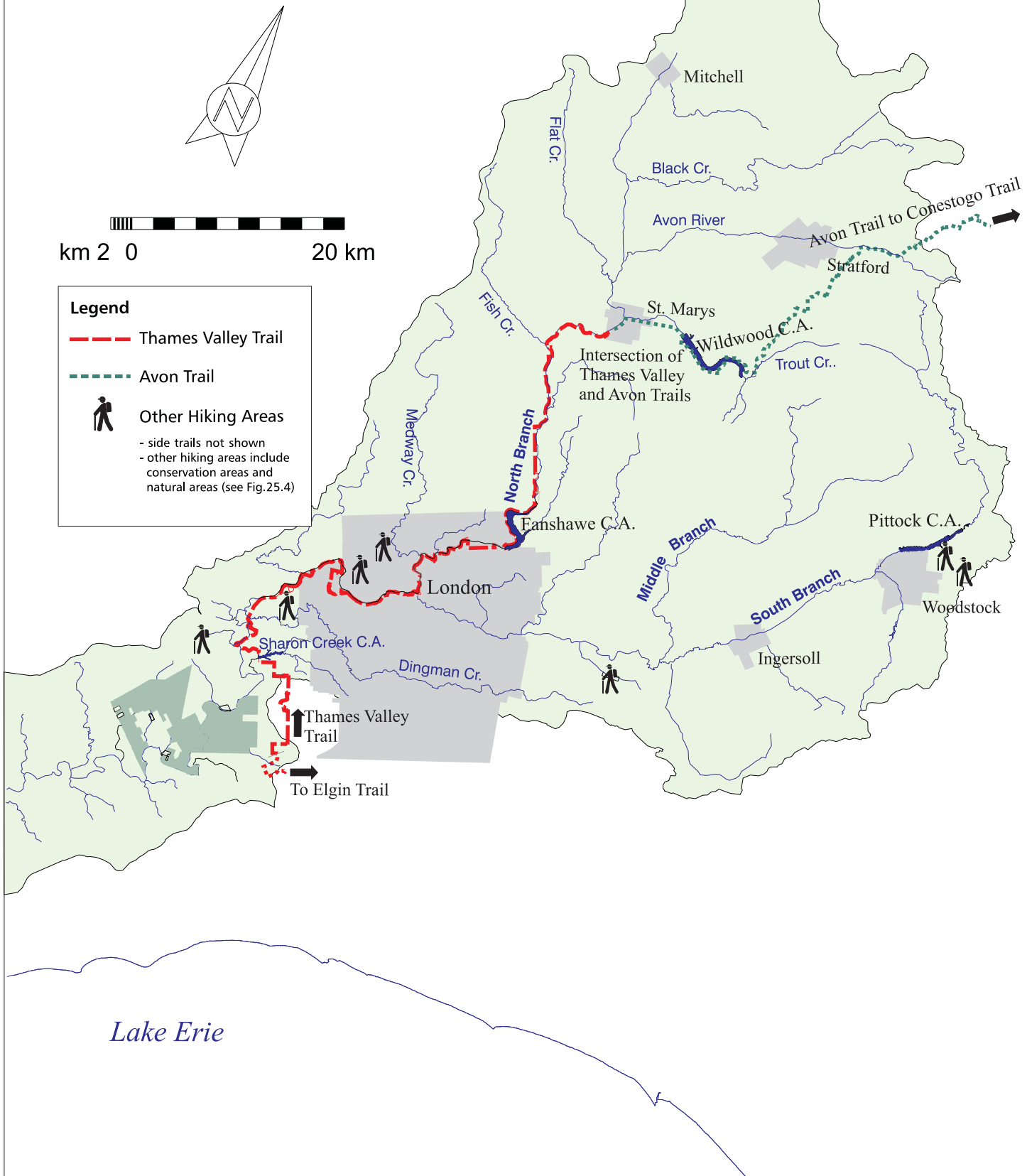
A number of side trails have also been cleared. Totaling close to 26 km, these “loop trails” allow hikers to deviate from the main trail without having to retrace their steps en route to the main trail (Thames Valley Trail Association, 1996,1). In addition, a number of sections of the Thames Valley Trail pass through and connect with existing trails in parklands and natural areas along the river. For example, the TVT merges with the Medway Valley Heritage Forest trail in northwest London.

### 24.3 Trail Associations

Dedicated to protecting, maintaining and developing trails along the Thames and Avon Rivers, local trail users have

# Canadian Heritage Rivers System

Figure 24.1 Location of Thames Valley and Avon Trails in the Upper Thames River Watershed



united. The Avon Trail, (the collective organization is not an Association) established in 1975, and the Thames Valley Trail Association, established in 1972, work in conjunction with ecologists, city planners and land owners to acquire and develop the network of trails along the Thames River system.

Through scheduled outings, education programs and community events, the hiking clubs attempt to raise public awareness and stress the importance of caring for our natural resources for recreation. Members frequently monitor the trails and re-route or close them if there are signs of over-use. Both the Avon Trail and the Thames Valley Trail Association play an important role in maintaining the integrity of these river-side trails.

#### 24.4 Park Trails

Trails have been developed in a number of parklands along the Thames River system. Some of the trails are paved multi-use pathways while others are only a roughly cleared footpath through dense vegetation. These trails provide a significant opportunity for recreation for many local residents.

The trails within the conservation areas (CAs) along the Thames River system provide hiking opportunities for people with a wide range of abilities and interests in all seasons. Bicycles are also permitted in part of Pittock CA where the 40 km Chesney Ride leads cyclists around the reservoir, utilizing both trails and roads.

Some park trails are suitable for cyclists, rollerbladers, runners and walkers. London has developed an extensive multi-use paved trail system both upstream and downstream of the Forks totalling some 20 km. Multi-use walkways have also been developed along the river in Stratford (see Figure 24.3), Mitchell, St. Marys, and Chatham.

**Figure 24.3 Multi-use Trail in Stratford along the Avon River**



Photo: Tourism Stratford

A number of loop trails have been cleared through the five Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESAs) within London. To protect the integrity of the plant and animal life,

use of these trails is limited to hikers. Komoka Provincial Park, a non-serviced park along the southern shore of the Thames River, contains three loop trails and the Thames Valley Trail. The TVT is limited to hikers only but the loop trails are used for hikers, cyclists, horse back riders and cross country skiers.

“In the last few years, with railroad companies abandoning thousands of kilometres of uneconomic track, interest has grown in the concept of converting abandoned railway rights of way into recreational trails. Once the ties are removed the trail is well suited to activities such as bird watching, walking, hiking and cycling” (Thames Valley Trail Association, 1996, 14).

The Town of St. Marys has developed 1.5 km of trail along the former Canadian Pacific (CP) lines. There are plans underway for an additional 3 km along former Grand Trunk rail lines (Barnes, pers. comm.). Now called the Riverview Walkway, it passes through parkland along the river, stretching along the eastern bank of the Thames River past some of the town’s historical landmarks (The Stonetown, Pamphlet).

#### Summary

**The several hundred kilometres of trail along the Thames River system provide a significant opportunity for hiking and other forms of recreation including biking, rollerblading, jogging and walking. Whether along the Avon Trail, the Thames Valley Trail or the many shorter trails in conservation areas and riverside municipal parklands trail users are able to experience a wide variety of terrain, appealing to a wide variety of abilities and pursuits.**

# Chapter 25

## Parklands and Campgrounds

There are dozens of parks and conservation areas along the Thames River and its tributaries that offer numerous recreational and leisure activities such as picnicking and camping. This chapter highlights a number of the significant sites which have been used historically and today.

### 25.1 Historical Use of Parklands

In the industrial age, as leisure time increased so too did social gatherings and picnicking. It was considered very fashionable, by Victorian standards, to prepare a feast and dine along the shore of the river. For example, Queen Victoria Park, on the banks of the Avon River in Stratford was considered a very fashionable location for picnickers in the 1880s (Lennon, 1985, 113). This park has since become a landmark in Stratford especially with the erection of the Stratford Shakespearean Theatre on the park grounds in 1953.

London's Springbank Park was also a very popular place to spend leisure time. Hundreds of people would gather in the park, to be entertained, dance, picnic and enjoy the scenery (Miller, 1988, 127). Wonderland Gardens was a very popular attraction in the early part of this century, especially during the Big Band Era. Parties, balls, and other large functions are still held in the ballroom. The adjoining restaurant, with its river-side patio tables, has an excellent reputation in London.

Fairmount Park near Beachville was a very popular summer gathering place in the 1990s. The streetcar Estelle

**Figure 25.1.** Strollers in Springbank Park, circa 1916.



Courtesy Alan Noon

carried crowds of people to this river-side park where they were entertained with theatrical and musical performances held under the pavilion.

### 25.2 Parklands

Parklands are green spaces within an urban centre. They frequently consist of treed areas with manicured lawns, playground equipment, sporting facilities and flower beds. Many have been developed along the banks of the river to take advantage of the scenic potential and to utilize land which cannot be developed due to flooding. These parks provide an outdoor experience for many urban dwellers. For over a hundred years these parklands have served as a place for social gatherings and community events. A list of the more popular municipal parks along the Thames River is given in Table 25.1.

#### Stratford

Stratford is known for the beauty of its parklands. In 1997, Stratford was the recipient of the "Nations in Bloom Award" for cities with a population of 20,000-50,000. This international award, announced in Madrid, Spain, recognizes the city for its beautiful parklands, environmental action and community involvement.

However, the picturesque setting of the Avon River was nearly destroyed in 1913 when a railway line was proposed along the north banks of the river (Wright, 1983, 165). Strong opposition to this movement was led by R. Thomas Orr and construction never began. Orr also had the foresight to attempt to connect the parks located at opposite ends of the Avon, creating an area that would be dedicated primarily to recreation (Stafford, 1972, 41). Today, the city boasts a string of parklands that fulfill the vision of Mr. Orr. Stretching from one end of the river to the other (see Figure 25.2), the parks encompass approximately 344 hectares of land (Leitch, 1980, 149).

**Figure 25.2** Tom Patterson Theatre and Parklands along the Avon River, Stratford



Photo: Tourism Stratford

The Shakespearean Gardens, with its formal English style gardens, borders the Avon and is the most visited area along the river. Once a mill site, it was acquired by the city in 1925 (Stafford, 1972, 46-7).

With the close proximity to the theatres, picnicking along the Avon River has become a tradition for the thousands of tourists that visit Stratford each year (see Figure 25.3). In fact, it has become so popular in recent years that a number of businesses catering specifically to the needs of picnickers have developed.

A star attraction of Stratford's river-side parks are the graceful Mute Swans which were introduced in 1918. Although the swans are treated like royalty today, they had nearly disappeared in 1949 (Leitch, 1980, 141). Their numbers were restored through the efforts of the Parks Board (Leitch, 1980,142). Today, they are synonymous with Stratford and the Shakespearean Festival.

**Table 25.1 Popular Municipal Parks along the Thames River System**

#### London

- Springbank Park
- Greenway Park
- Cavendish Park
- Harris Park
- Gibbons Park
- Thames Park
- Ivey Park/Peace Gardens
- London South Branch Parks
- Stoneybrook Park
- Adelaide St. Wells Park
- Ross Park

#### Stratford

- Avondale Park
- Queen's Park
- Shakespearean Gardens
- Confederation Park

#### Chatham

- Tecumseh Park
- Collins Park
- Legion Park
- Water Street Park
- Riverview Park

#### St. Marys

- McGiveron Parkway
- The Flats
- Kin Park
- Particapark
- Riverview Walkway Park

#### Mitchell

- Lions Park
- Centennial Park
- Morenz Memorial Park

#### Beachville

- Two unnamed parks

#### Ingersoll

- Centennial Park
- Victoria Park
- John Lawson Park

**Figure 25.3 Avon River, Stratford**



#### London

The City of London has developed some of its largest parklands within the floodplain of the Thames River and its tributaries. Encompassing close to 1150 hectares of land, these parks offer a vast array of uses. Most are used for walking and picnicking, and many contain playground equipment, sport fields, tennis courts and the like. A few of the parks have been left in a natural state, but most contain manicured lawns.

For over a century, Springbank Park is one of the most heavily used parks in the city. This parkland, presently 140 hectares in size, was a recreational hot spot during the time when passenger steamships dominated the waters of the Thames. Londoners boarded the ships at the Forks of the river and travelled to Springbank for the day.

Currently, Springbank Park features beautiful formal gardens, Storybook Gardens (a children's tourist attraction), Wonderland Gardens, the Guy Lombardo Museum, docking for the London Princess Cruise Line, boat houses and docking for the Joe McManus Canoeing and Rowing Facility, and plenty of open green space for picnicking and other

recreational activities. A variety of trees, numerous waterfowl and other small birds attract visitors to this parkland. A paved multi-use trail links Springbank with other river-side parks in the city (see Figure 25.4). In fact, it is possible to cycle from Springbank Park in west London to the University of Western Ontario in the north and Meadowlily Woods in east London along the river-side trail/park system.

**Figure 25.4 Biking in Springbank Park, London**



Photo: Richard Bain

### **Chatham**

One of the most visited parklands in the City of Chatham is the centrally located Tecumseh Park. It was named after the great Shawnee Chief who was killed in the Battle of the Thames, a short distance away. The park hosts numerous community events and festivals. It is located on the former grounds of a military garrison, established along the banks of the Thames River in the late 1830s (see Human Heritage 17.2.4). It also served as a dock for steamers to unload passengers. Today, Tecumseh Park features a bandshell, formal gardens, a lawn bowling club, a network of pathways and access to the river in the shadow of the armouries. It is also a popular spot for picnicking, walking, or just sitting and watching the river slowly slip by.

### **Other Towns**

The Town of Mitchell has been developing its parklands since the 1940s (Mitchell Centennial, 114). Currently, the town boasts “one of the best park systems for a town of its size” (Heritage Walking Tour of Mitchell - Pamphlet). St.

Marys features numerous parklands along the banks of the North Branch of the Thames River and Trout Creek which meet in the town. Parks such as the Flats, Particapark and Riverview Walkway Park are popular with picnickers and walkers.

### **25.3 Camping**

As travel costs continue to rise, an increasing number of people are choosing camping as an inexpensive holiday alternative (Burgess, 1986, 25). People are also in search of the “natural experience” available at campgrounds. Campgrounds along the Thames River system provide many of the basic amenities within close proximity to major urban centres, while preserving the beauty of the natural surroundings.

There are about 18 private campgrounds situated close to the Thames River and its tributaries. Together they offer hundreds of camping sites and facilities for the public. Four children’s camps are also situated close to the river. These private campgrounds/camps are listed in Table 25.2 and mapped in Figure 25.5.

**Table 25.2 Some of the Private Campgrounds within the Thames River Watershed**

- 1 Woodland Lake Park, Bornholm
- 2 Windmill Park, Fullarton
- 3 Science Hill, St. Marys
- 4 Camp Bimini (Children’s Camp), Stratford
- 5 Stratford Fairgrounds Tourist Camp, Stratford
- 6 Prospect Hill, Granton
- 7 Happy Hills Park, Embro
- 8 Lakeside Summer Resort, Lakeside
- 9 Hidden Valley Park, Woodstock
- 10 Maple Grove Christian Retreat Centre, Thamesford
- 11 KOA Kampground (Hwy 401)
- 12 Cove Mobile Home Park, London
- 13 Woodeden Children’s Camp, Kilworth
- 14 Oriole Park Resort, Komoka
- 15 Fernwood Campground, Komoka
- 16 Valley View Campground, Wardsville
- 17 Lighthouse Cove Campground

Six conservation areas offer camping as well and these are listed in Table 25.3. The largest campgrounds in the watershed are contained within Wildwood, Fanshawe and Pittock Conservation Areas. Together, they offer over 1300 campsites. All of the conservation area campgrounds offer a full range of services from electricity, water, firewood, hiking trails, swimming in the nearby reservoirs or pools, fishing docks, activities and events, pavilions and camp stores.

**Table 25.3 Conservation Areas which offer Camping Along the Thames River System**

Conservation Area	No. Of Camping Sites
Wildwood (UTRCA)	450
Fanshawe (UTRCA)	650
Pittock (UTRCA)	250
Sharon Creek (LTVCA)	groups only
Longwoods (LTVCA)	groups only
Big Bend (LTVCA)	26

UTRCA (Upper Thames River Conservation Authority)  
LTVCA (Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority)

Fanshawe attracts over 100,000 campers a year (see Figure 25.6), while Wildwood and Pittock attract over 79,000 and 41,000, respectively (UTRCA, 1996). The seasonal campers at these three conservation areas have formed campers associations. Members volunteer their time organizing dances, bingos, tournaments and fundraising for park equipment and facilities. These campgrounds, operated by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA), attract tourists from about a 100 km radius (Sauder, pers. comm.). Wildwood draws tourists from the furthest away (e.g. Michigan), especially those attending the Stratford Festival. The private campgrounds likely have a similar draw.

**Figure 25.6 Camping at Fanshawe CA**



Photo: UTRCA

There are several conservation areas (C.A.s) operated by the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA) which offer limited camping facilities (see Table 25.3). Sharon Creek and Longwoods Conservation Areas, near Delaware, offer group camping. Longwoods C.A. provides three group camping areas that can accommodate a total of 600 campers and Big Bend C.A., near Wardsville, has 26 individual campsites.

There are also a number of small clearings along the banks of the river for “wilderness” camping. Very rustic in nature, these clearings are most often used by paddlers canoeing the Thames or hikers walking the Thames Valley Trail. Paddlers can also camp at the many river-side campgrounds, both privately or authority owned.

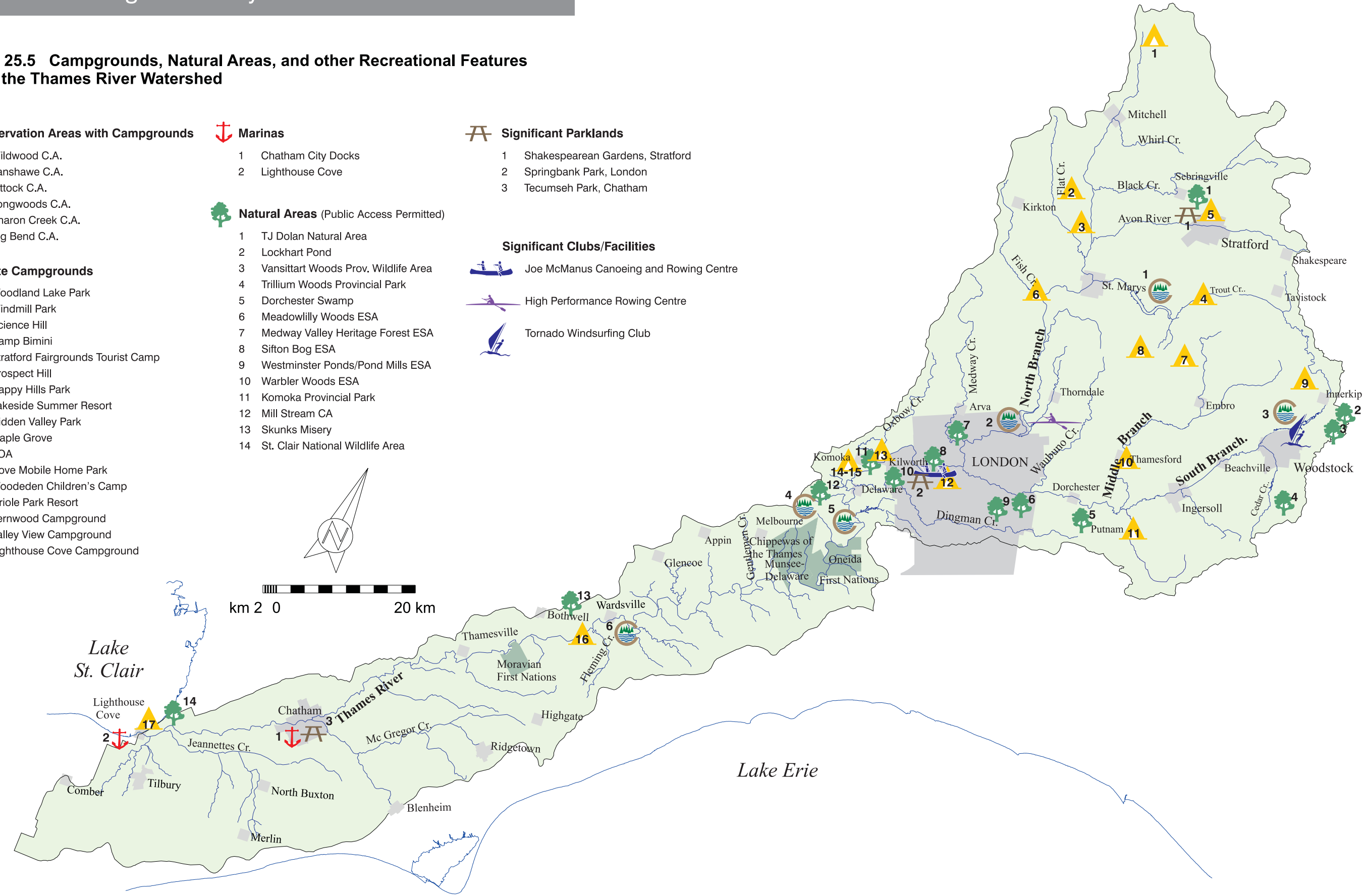
### Summary

**Local residents and tourists have enormous opportunities to spend time near the Thames River in the numerous parklands, campgrounds and conservation areas in the region. These areas provide a diversity of facilities which appeal to people seeking a range of outdoor pursuits.**

# Canadian Heritage Rivers System

**Figure 25.5 Campgrounds, Natural Areas, and other Recreational Features within the Thames River Watershed**

- |   |  |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|
|  | <b>Conservation Areas with Campgrounds</b> |  | <b>Marinas</b>                                 |  | <b>Significant Parklands</b>           |
| 1   | Wildwood C.A.                              | 1   | Chatham City Docks                             | 1   | Shakespearean Gardens, Stratford       |
| 2   | Fanshawe C.A.                              | 2   | Lighthouse Cove                                | 2   | Springbank Park, London                |
| 3   | Pittock C.A.                               |   |  | 3   | Tecumseh Park, Chatham                 |
| 4   | Longwoods C.A.                             |   |  |   |  |
| 5   | Sharon Creek C.A.                          |  | <b>Natural Areas (Public Access Permitted)</b> |   |  |
| 6   | Big Bend C.A.                              | 1   | TJ Dolan Natural Area                          |   |  |
|   |  | 2   | Lockhart Pond                                  |   |  |
|  | <b>Private Campgrounds</b>                 | 3   | Vansittart Woods Prov. Wildlife Area           |  | <b>Significant Clubs/Facilities</b>    |
| 1   | Woodland Lake Park                         | 4   | Trillium Woods Provincial Park                 | 1   | Joe McManus Canoeing and Rowing Centre |
| 2   | Windmill Park                              | 5   | Dorchester Swamp                               | 2   | High Performance Rowing Centre         |
| 3   | Science Hill                               | 6   | Meadowlilly Woods ESA                          | 3   | Tornado Windsurfing Club               |
| 4   | Camp Bimini                                | 7   | Medway Valley Heritage Forest ESA              |   |  |
| 5   | Stratford Fairgrounds Tourist Camp         | 8   | Sifton Bog ESA                                 |   |  |
| 6   | Prospect Hill                              | 9   | Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills ESA               |   |  |
| 7   | Happy Hills Park                           | 10  | Warbler Woods ESA                              |   |  |
| 8   | Lakeside Summer Resort                     | 11  | Komoka Provincial Park                         |   |  |
| 9   | Hidden Valley Park                         | 12  | Mill Stream CA                                 |   |  |
| 10  | Maple Grove                                | 13  | Skunks Misery                                  |   |  |
| 11  | KOA  | 14  | St. Clair National Wildlife Area               |   |  |
| 12  | Cove Mobile Home Park                      |   |  |   |  |
| 13  | Wooden Children's Camp                     |   |  |   |  |
| 14  | Oriole Park Resort                         |   |  |   |  |
| 15  | Fernwood Campground                        |   |  |   |  |
| 16  | Valley View Campground                     |   |  |   |  |
| 17  | Lighthouse Cove Campground                 |   |  |   |  |



# Chapter 26

## Nature Appreciation

This section examines the many natural areas located along the Thames River system. Used by a growing number of people for nature appreciation, these areas sustain many unique species of plant and animal life not to be found elsewhere in Canada. Although much has been lost, a wide variety of significant natural areas remains along the river for naturalists and others to enjoy.

### 26.1 Natural Areas

Southwestern Ontario has lost much of its original forest cover to agriculture and urban development. The natural areas which remain, however, are treasured. A natural area is a parcel of land that is dominated by native vegetation and, though it may contain trails, does not have the sports equipment and manicured lawns of city parks. Some of the natural areas have been preserved because they are inaccessible, unfarmable, located on flood-prone land, or have been specifically set aside due to their unique qualities or the presence of rare species. As a result, natural areas are

concentrated near the Thames River and its tributaries rather than in upland locations in the watershed.

Nature appreciation takes many forms for many people. Some common forms include: viewing spring wildflowers and fall colours, spring and fall birding, plant identification, insect identification, animal tracking and year round hiking. Since most of the Thames River watershed lies within the biologically diverse Carolinian Floristic Region (see Natural Heritage 5.0), nature enthusiasts are able to view an unusually large variety of plants, birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates.

Some of the natural areas contain mature forests while others, such as Fanshawe Conservation Area, contain young forests, the result of renaturalization projects over the last 30-40 years. The City of London and the UTRCA own and manage five Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) within the city limits (see Figure 26.1). The diverse nature of the swamps, meadows, marshes and woodlands contained in these areas are enjoyed by thousands of Londoners. Many other woodlots along the Thames River are privately owned and, thus, access is limited. The First Nations reserves also contain significant amounts of woodland and natural vegetation.

Table 26.1 lists 25 sites which contain significant amounts of natural vegetation and are open to the public. Descriptions of the area's location, size, ownership, dominant vegetation, trails, and special features are also summarized in this table. The sites are mapped in Figure 25.5

**Table 26.1 Natural Areas With Public Access Within the Thames River Watershed**

Natural Area	Location	Size (ha)	Status	Dominant Vegetation type	Trails	Features
T.J. Dolan Natural Area	Stratford (2)	25	Municipal Park	Floodplain woods with reforested areas	✓	Wide variety of tree species and birds
Wildwood Conservation Area	E of St. Marys (2)	1200	Conservation Area and Ducks Unlimited Site	Floodplain and upland woods with reforested areas	✓	Excellent viewing of waterfowl and shorebirds
Fanshawe Conservation Area	NE London (1)	1250	Conservation Area	Floodplain and upland woods with reforested areas	✓	Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle below dam; excellent waterfowl viewing, songbirds
Lockhart Pond Provincial Wildlife Area	NE of Woodstock (3)	35	Provincial Wildlife Area	Bog and upland woods	✓	Unique bog flora, floating mat of Sphagnum mosses
Vansittart Woods Provincial Wildlife Area	NE of Woodstock (3)	80	Provincial Wildlife Area and Class 2 Wetland	Swamp and upland woods	✓	Wood Duck nesting site
Pittock Conservation Area	NE of Woodstock (1)	800	Class 1 Wetland	Floodplain and upland woods with reforested areas	✓	Migratory stopover for ducks, geese and swans

**Table 26.1 Natural Areas With Public Access Within the Thames River Watershed**

Natural Area	Location	Size (ha)	Status	Dominant Vegetation type	Trails	Features
Trillium Woods Provincial Nature Reserve	E of Woodstock (3)	10	Provincial Nature Reserve	Upland woods	✓	Display of variegated trilliums and birds in spring
Dorchester Swamp	SE of Dorchester (3)	548	Carolinian Canada Site and Class 1 Wetland	Mature deciduous swamp	✓*	Large area with many uncommon, northern plants; also a significant water storage area
Meadowlily Woods	London (1)	135	E.S.A. and Class 3 Wetland	Floodplain and ravine forest	✓	Diverse bird life and rare plant species
Medway Valley Heritage Forest	London (2)	300	E.S.A.	Floodplain forest, mature and secondary growth	✓	Uncommon species of trees, shrubs and flowers
Sifton Bog	London (3)	28	E.S.A. and Class 2 Wetland	Bog	✓	Unique boreal/bog vegetation (largely intact)
Westminster Ponds/Pond Mills Complex	London (3)	—	E.S.A. and Class — Wetland	Mature woods with kettle ponds	✓	Carolinian trees and shrubs such; bog plants line the pond shores
Warbler Woods	London (3)	—	E.S.A.	Mature woods on rolling moraine	✓	Large Carolinian Trees (American Chestnut)
Komoka Provincial Park	S of Kilworth (1)	200	Provincial Nature Reserve	Floodplain and upland with ravines	✓	woods More than 24 different plant communities and uncommon winter birds
Millstream Conservation Area	SW of Delaware (3)	10	Conservation Area	Deciduous Forest		Spring season features a wide variety of blooms. A variety of birds also nest in the area
Sharon Creek Conservation Area	SE of Delaware (2)	36	Conservation Area	Upland woods	✓	Steep wooded banks around the lake as well as numerous cedars
Longwoods Conservation Area	SW of Delaware (3)	63	Conservation Area	Deciduous forest, meadows and stream valleys	✓	Habitat for unique species of birds
Big Bend Conservation Area	E of Wardsville (1)	16	Conservation Area	Deciduous forest	✓*	Uncommon Carolinian flora and Map and Midland Painted Turtles
Skunk's Misery	SE of Bothwell (3)	1200	Carolinian Canada Site and Class 1 Wetland	Deciduous swamp and forest	✓*	Huge area with rare Carolinian species, significant bird habitat and uncommon reptiles
Sinclair's Bush	SE of Blenheim (3)	46	Carolinian Canada Site	Deciduous forest		Carolinian species and spring wildflowers
St. Clair National Wildlife Area	N of mouth of Thames on Lake St. Clair (3)	244	Carolinian Canada Site and Class 1 Wetland	Cattail marsh and wet prairie	✓	Rare species of plants and numerous water birds

Location: (1) = along Thames River; (2) = along major tributary of Thames; (3) = within watershed

Trails: \* = limited trail system

Primary Source: Lorimer (1996)

**Figure 26.1 Meadowlily Woods E.S.A., London**

Photo: Cathy Quinlan

## 26.2 Naturalist Groups

Interest in nature and, in particular, the rich and interesting Carolinian plants and animals that exist within the Thames River watershed, has led many people within the watershed to form naturalist groups or clubs to share their interest.

The McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London, one of the oldest naturalist clubs in Canada, formed in 1864 as an entomological club. During the Victorian era, it was not uncommon to occupy leisure time collecting and examining insects. Due to its popularity among Londoners the club served as a forerunner in entomological studies in Canada (Wake, pers. comm.). Over the years, interests changed and members began to study plants, birds and fossils. Today, the clubs's emphasis is on education, science, conservation and nature appreciation. Nature walks, slide shows, lectures, and bird counts are popular activities (see Figure 26.2). Members have been actively involved in numerous political activities in the London area including the struggle to protect the five Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) described in the previous section. The "birding wing" of the club is very active and compiles and publishes information on the birds of Middlesex County annually (see Natural Heritage 6.0).

A number of other nature appreciation organizations

have taken root in communities along the Thames River including the Stratford Field Naturalists (established 1967), West Elgin Nature Club, Woodstock Field Naturalists (established 1934), and the Ingersoll Nature Club (established in the early 1950's). Scheduled outings frequently include portions of the Thames River system. Nature walks, canoe trips, and bird counts are some of the favourite activities. Through their work, these organizations are also responsible for helping to educate others within the community about the fragile state of nature.

Naturalist clubs often work with city planners and conservation authorities and other like-minded groups to preserve and restore local natural areas. Their continued efforts will ensure the vitality of natural areas along the Thames River system for appreciation and recreation in the years to come.

### Summary

**Numerous natural areas exist along the Thames River and within the watershed. These remnant woodlots and wetlands contain many unique Carolinian species and are appreciated by thousands of nature enthusiasts. The five naturalist clubs in the watershed take special interest and pride in these natural areas, often defending their preservation.**

**Figure 26.2 Naturalists in Sifton Bog**

Photo: UTRCA

# Chapter 27

## Human Heritage Appreciation

Numerous communities along the Thames River pride themselves on the depth of their human heritage and its close association with the river. Special events, festivals, structural landmarks and museums pay homage to this history. This chapter describes a number of the popular events and monuments that reflect human heritage along the Thames River.

### 27.1 Re-created Villages

There are three villages in the watershed which re-create life in historic times including Fanshawe Pioneer Village, Lawson Prehistoric Indian Village (London Museum of Archaeology) and the Ska-Nah-Doht Iroquoian Village. All are open to the public and provide visitors with an opportunity to re-live daily customs of a time gone by.

Fanshawe Pioneer Village is located within Fanshawe Conservation Area. The village depicts life in a rural community in the 1800s and early 1900s (see Figure 27.1). The village contains 25 structures including a log school house, blacksmith's shop, church, and general store. There are demonstrations of a printing press, bread baking over an open hearth, and tool making by a blacksmith. Numerous volunteers, dressed in period costume, bring the demonstrations to life (Fanshawe Pioneer Village - Pamphlet). There are ongoing efforts to acquire old structures and re-locate them to the village. The village is extremely popular with local residents and tourists, hosting approximately 40,000 visitors a year (Ollivier, pers. comm.).

Figure 27.1 Fanshawe Pioneer Village



Photo: UTRCA

The London Museum of Archaeology located along Medway Creek in northwest London, contains a re-created Attawandaron village. The village has been re-created on the grounds of a former settlement. A striking palisade, made up of tall branches and logs, surrounds part of the village. A longhouse has been reconstructed based upon on-site excavations and descriptions gathered by First Nation peoples (see Figure 27.2). Portions of the village are still being excavated (Discover Ontario - Pamphlet). This historic site "is Canada's only ongoing excavation and reconstruction of a prehistoric site, retracing the lives of the Neutral Indians who inhabited the five acre site 500 years ago" (Armstrong, 1986, 14). A museum is also located on-site.

Figure 27.2 Longhouse at the London Museum of Archaeology



Photo: Cathy Quinlan

The Ska-Nah-Doht Iroquoian Village, located within Longwoods Road Conservation Area, features a village reflective of the Native settlements found along the river close to 1000 years ago. This village, created with the information gathered by archaeologists and First Nation peoples, offers tours, workshops and an opportunity to see how Iroquois people once lived (Longwoods Conservation Area - Pamphlet). It is also a popular attraction for local residents and tourists alike. About 28,000 people visited the Iroquoian Village and Conservation Area in 1996 (Carey, pers. comm.).

### 27.2 Re-enactments

Historically, the Thames River and its banks were the site of a number of skirmishes (see Cultural Heritage, 14.2). In memory of the battles fought and the lives lost, these conflicts are re-enacted.

The Kent Military Re-enactment Society's re-enactment of the Battle of Longwoods is an annual event that has taken place every year since 1990. About 200 volunteers, dressed in period costume, depict the battle scene for the hundreds of spectators who turn out annually.

The Battle of the Thames, where the great Shawnee

Chief Tecumseh was killed, is re-enacted at the annual Heritage Days held at Thamesgrove Conservation Area in Chatham. Skirmishes on the Thames River are also held (see Figure 27.3). This “Faire at the Forks” is a huge event which features a voyageur village, blacksmith’s tent, military encampment, and shops, circa 1813. Visitors can carouse with John McGregor, listen to a minstrel, or relax at the village tavern and enjoy period food (Heritage Days - Pamphlet).

**Figure 27.3** Re-enactment, Heritage Days, Chatham



Photo: Cathy Quinlan

The Upper Thames Military Re-enactment Society also plays an active role in the recreation of a number of military displays in this part of the watershed. The annual Heritage Days celebration in the Town of Ingersoll, features a display reflective of a time gone by. Under the direction of the Norfolk Militia, a military encampment is set up on the grounds of Centennial Park, along Halls Creek. Ongoing demonstrations and mock battles are among the features of this annual celebration (Lovell, pers. comm.).

In addition to the military re-enactments, Chatham and London also host Voyageur Canoe Races. The Chatham races are accompanied by a voyageur encampment which depicts life in the times of the voyageurs and fur-traders (see Section 21.8).

### 27.3 Museums

Many of the museums in Thames River communities are housed within structural landmarks or located on a particular site because of its value in terms of the historical development of the area.

The Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museum, located along Halls Creek in Ingersoll was established about 20 years ago. The museum depicts a mid-nineteenth century cheese factory operation, a focal point in the development of Ingersoll (see Figure 27.4).

**Figure 27.4** Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museum



The Beachville District Museum is located in the backyard of a functional limestone quarry. The museum occupies the home of a former quarry owner and operator, Mr. Downing. The Downing family home, built in 1851 along the south banks of the river, houses some of Beachville’s long history. Tourists to the area may examine the various displays and artifacts from the Lime Capitol of Canada. Many date back to the 1800s, including a model of the first game of baseball reportedly played in Beachville (Beachville District Museum - Pamphlet).

The London Museum of Archaeology, located along the Medway Creek in London, is a prized museum for local residents, tourists, and school groups. A tour through the Museum Gallery illustrates the existence of Nomadic Hunters (9000-7000 B.C.), Hunters, Fishers and Foragers (7500-1000 B.C.), Traders and Potters (1000 B.C.-500 A.D.), Early Farmers (800-1550 A.D.), and Contact and Conflict (1550-1650 A.D.). Models, artifacts, carvings and paintings bring this ancient and evolving time period to life (Discover Ontario’s - Pamphlet).

Eldon House, built along the North Branch in 1834 by the prominent Harris family is the oldest surviving residence in London (see Human Heritage 13.2.1). It houses many of the Harris family heirlooms and treasures. The home has been maintained as it was near the turn of the century. The beautiful home and the idyllic location of the property near the river, make it a popular destination for Londoners and visitors.

The Fairfield Museum, located near Wardsville, commemorates the former Village of Fairfield, now known as Moraviantown (see First Nations, 17.0). The Delaware people settled this land as far back as 1792. The village of Fairfield was destroyed by the invading Americans following the Battle of the Thames. Following the Peace of 1814, the Delaware tribe re-established their settlement on the south bank of the Thames in Moraviantown. A replica of an original homestead has been erected on the museum grounds. The village burying ground can also be visited. A viewing platform allows one to see across the Thames to the settlement established after 1814.

The Buxton Historic Site and Museum in North

Buxton, houses many artifacts and structures relating to the town's role in the Underground Railroad. The town, originally known as the Elgin Settlement, was a landmark for freedom for the fleeing African American slaves in 1849. Under the guidance of Rev. William King, a Black settlement flourished here of some 1200 to 2000 persons. Many of their ancestors still reside in the village today. Many original structures remain standing including the second school house which now functions as part of the museum (see Figure 27.5) The history of the black people and their journey up the Thames and Sydenham Rivers is housed in the museum (An African-Canadian Heritage Tour - Pamphlet).

**Figure 27.5. Students, teacher and schoolhouse, North Buxton, c. 1910**



Source: Hill, 1981.

Museums in St. Marys, Stratford, Woodstock and Chatham also house some of the artifacts and details related to settlement and development along the Thames.

## 27.4 Special Events

Summer Festivals and Fall Fairs along the entire length of the Thames River are popular events for showcasing local culture. Among many of the feature attractions there is a close association to the river.

Pow Wows are held annually at the First Nation Reserves of Munsee Delaware, Chippewa, and Moraviantown. Members of the First Nation communities perform customary dance rituals in traditional costumes (see Figure 26.3). The dances are symbolic movements tied to the spiritual beliefs of the people. The Pow-Wows are open to the public and provide a significant opportunity to learn about and appreciate the culture of the First Nations peoples who live along the Thames River.

**Figure 27.6 Traditional Dance at Pow Wow**



Photo: Chatham Daily News, May 31/97

In Chatham, a display of Scottish tradition is held at the Annual Championship Supreme Highland Games. The presence of Scottish influence on recreation in Chatham can be traced back to 1817, when a touring minstrel made note of the area's activities as being of "Scottish influence" (Day, 1977, 72). Approximately 4000-5000 spectators come from miles around to Tecumseh Park on the Thames to witness such competitions as the hammer throw, the farmers walk, the caber toss and the stone throw. This family affair is one of only two in the area offering such authentic Scottish tradition. The proximity to the water is also appealing to boaters who are drawn to the event by the sound of the bag pipes echoing across the city (Colquhoun, pers. comm.).

Tecumseh Park is also the location of the annual Festival of Nations which is held on the July 1st long weekend. The event celebrates Canada's multicultural heritage. The Festival of Nations showcases a parade, ethnic food, dancing, canoe races, a fishing derby and nightly entertainment. It is estimated that 120,000 people enjoyed the 1996 Festival of Nations (Logan, pers. comm.).

## 27.5 Historical Tours

Old mills, bridges and homes along the entire length of the river are evidence of the rich cultural heritage. Since a number of structures remain intact, communities organize tours to showcase their heritage and educate visitors and residents.

Stratford features a number of historical sites near the heart of the city. A variety of walking tours guide visitors through a passage in time. Tour highlights include the site of a former Indian encampment, the Festival Square, the Shakespearean Gardens and a number of architectural masterpieces.

The Heritage Walking Tour of Mitchell showcases many heritage homes, churches and a hotel that played a significant role in the development of this river-side town. Tours along the banks of Cedar Creek, in Woodstock, provide an exciting opportunity to view some of the local culture.

The City of London also features a variety of walking tours. Some of the tours focus on the history of the area, while others look more closely at the architectural features of the many structures still standing. Since early settlement in London was centred along the river, so too are a number of the tours. The homes of prominent citizens, the old courthouse and the location of some of the earliest London merchants are featured along the tours.

Growing in popularity with citizens of the Chatham area is the Spirit Walk. This exciting adventure takes visitors on a lantern guided tour of an historic district near the river. Along the journey, locals in costume portray historical characters that had an impact on the development of the city (Luscio, pers. comm.).

The African-Canadian Heritage Tour directs participants to several sites in Kent and Lambton Counties which played a role in the Underground Railway and provided homesteads for fleeing slaves. The tour visits such landmarks as the Buxton Historic Site and Museum, the First Baptist Church in Chatham and Uncle Tom's Cabin in Dresden. The First Baptist Church was founded by refugee slaves in 1841 and "stands as a symbol of everlasting spiritual freedom" (An African-Canadian Heritage Tour - Pamphlet).

## Summary

**The Thames River valley and the communities along the shore have a long, rich cultural heritage. This section has pointed to some of the most significant opportunities for human heritage appreciation. The recreated villages, special events, museums and tours reflect the strong appreciation for the history of the area and attract both local residents and tourists.**

# Bibliography for Recreation

- Adams, et al, 1996. Rediscovering London's River: An Historical Documentation of the Thames. The University of Western Ontario, Department of History.
- Armstrong, Frederick H, 1986. The Forest City: An Illustrated History of London, Canada.
- Bouchier, Nancy, 1990. For the Love of the Game and the Honour of the Town: Organized Sport, Local Culture and Middle Class Hegemony in Two Ontario Towns 1838-1895.
- Burgess, Carolyn Ann, 1986. Water-Based Recreation: Current Trends and Future Requirements A Case Study of Pickering and Ajax, Ontario. The University of Western Ontario, Department of Geography.
- Charles, Peter D., and Doug Rylett. 1979. At the Forks: An Architectural Book on the City of Chatham. Chatham, Ontario. Mercury Press.
- Day, Robert Douglas, 1977. Impulse to Addiction: A Narrative History of Sport in Chatham, Ontario 1790-1895. The University of Western Ontario, Faculty of Physical Education, Thesis, Volume I & II.
- Hamil, Fred Coyne, 1951. Valley of the Lower Thames 1640-1850. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Hill, Daniel G., 1981. The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada. The Book Society of Canada Limited. Agincourt, Canada.
- Hilts, Stewart G., ed., 1977. Natural Areas in London, Ontario: Towards an Appreciation. The University of Western Ontario, Department of Geography.
- Lawton, Laura Jane, 1984. A Comparative Study of Day Use and Campground Visitors at Three Conservation Areas. The University of Western Ontario, Department of Geography.
- Leitch, Adelaide, 1980. Floodtides of Fortune: The Story of Stratford and the Progress of the City Through Two Centuries. Stratford, Ontario: The Beacon Herald Fine Printing Division, & Toronto, Ontario: T.H. Best Printing Company Ltd..
- Lennon, Mary Jane, 1985. A Stratford Album: Memories of the Festival City. Boston: The Boston Mills Press.
- Lorimer, Shirley, ed., 1996. Guide to the Natural Areas of London & Vicinity, 2nd edition. London: McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London Ontario Inc.
- McTaggart, Kenneth, 1996. Boating History. In Anita Caveney, ed. Focus on the Thames: Natural and Cultural Heritage of the River, London, Ontario. A joint publication of the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.
- Miller, Orlo. 1988. This was London. Westport: Buternut Press Inc.
- Morello, E. (Alternate Au.), 1974. Mitchell Centennial: 1874-1974.
- Morrow, Don, Mary Keyes, Wayne Simpson, Frank Cosentino and Ron Lappage, 1989. A Concise History of Sport in Canada. Toronto: Oxford University Press.
- Robinson, Judy and Dean Robinson, 1987. Mitchell: A Reflection. Erin: The Boston Mills Press.
- Shraeder, Harald A., 1996. The Fish Community. In Anita Caveney, ed. Focus on the Thames: Natural and Cultural Heritage of the River, London, Ontario. A joint publication of the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.
- Stafford, Ellen, 1972. Stratford Around and About. Stratford: Fanfare Books.
- Thames Valley Trail Association Inc., 1996. A Guide to Hiking the Thames Valley Trail, 2nd edition. London.
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, 1996. Annual Report.
- Wake, Winnifred (Cairns), ed., 1997. Federation of Ontario Naturalists. A Nature Guide to Ontario. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Williams, Art and E. Baker, 1967. Bits and Pieces: A Montage of Woodstock, Ontario. Woodstock.
- Wilson, L.W. and L.R. Pfaff, 1981. Early St. Marys: A

History in Old Photographs From Its Founding to 1914. St. Marys: St. Marys-on-the-Thames Historical Society in Association with The Boston Mills Press: Erin, Ontario.

Zeigler, Earle F., 1988. History of Physical Education and Sport. Illinois: Stipes Publishing Company.

## Pamphlets, Guides, and Inserts

An African-Canadian Heritage Tour, Raleigh Township Centennial Museum, North Buxton.

A Walk A Day - Around Woodstock.

Avon Trail Guide: St. Marys to Conestogo, 2nd edition. Stratford.

Beachville District Museum Guide. Beachville: Beachville District Museum.

Big Bend Conservation Area. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

Chatham City Docks. Chatham. 1997.

Chatham-Kent: Touring Kent County. The Chatham Daily News with the Chatham-Kent Tourist Bureau (May 3197).

Discover Ontario's Archaeological Past. London Museum of Archeology.

Fanshawe Conservation Area: Hiking and Cross-Country Skiing Trails. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Fanshawe Pioneer Village. London.

Festival of Nations: Celebrate Our Cultures. Chatham. 1997.

Heritage Days: "The Faire at the Forks". Chatham.

Heritage Walking Tour of Mitchell. Mitchell.

Lighthouse Conservation Area. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

London Canoe Club. London.

Medway Valley Heritage Forest Natural Area. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Meadowlily Woods Natural Area. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Millstream Conservation Area. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

Paddling Portraits of Nature: Canoe the Lower Thames River. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

Sharon Creek Conservation Area. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

Sifton Bog Natural Area. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Sinclair's Bush. Lower Thames Valley Conservation

Authority.

Sports on the Thames. Oxford Historical Society.

Stonetown, The - St. Marys. St. Marys: St. Marys Journal Argus. 1997.

Storeybook Gardens. London: Tourism London.

Stratford Strolls: Exploring Our Heritage. Tourism Stratford and Perth County Historical Foundation.

Thamesgrove Conservation Area. Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority.

Upper Thames River Canoe Route: St. Marys to Delaware. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

Wildwood Conservation Area: Hiking and Cross-Country Skiing Trails. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.

## List of Personal Communications

### Boating

Coyle, Brent - Pittock Windsurfing Club

Culver, Luke - Chatham Power Squadron

Crispin, George - London Princess Cruise Lines

Feulgen, Udo - London Canoe Club

Gene, Ken - Stratford Canoe Club

Goodall, Greg - Woodstock Rowing

Haggeman, Rudy - Marina at Lighthouse Cove

Hawkins, Gary - Chatham Canoe Club

Herr, Frank - Owner/Operator Juliet III Cruising Line

McClatchie, Jack - Historian of Yacht Clubs

McTaggart, Ken - Boating History in London

Murphy, Dr. Michael - London Rowing

Shaw, Noreen - Chinese Canadian National Council, London, Dragon Boat Racing

Speller, Earl - Chatham Power Squadron

Vincent, Bob - London Canoe Club

### Fishing and Hunting

Fairburn, Don - Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

Howey, Les - Thames River Anglers, London

Hector, Don - Ministry of Natural Resources, Chatham

Piper, Russ - Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

Riehl, Jim - London Sport Fishery Association

Schraeder, Hal - Ministry of Natural Resources, Alymer

Williams, Glyn - English Style Carp Derbies, London

**Trails and Corridors**

Barnes, Sharon - Director of Recreation, St. Marys  
Cockset, Bill - Manager of Operations, Parks and Forestry,  
London  
Fisher, Jim - President of the Avon Trail Association  
Law, Jean - Hike Ontario  
Stenhouse, Carmen - President of the Thames Valley Trail  
Association

**Parklands and Campgrounds**

Sauder, Steve - Marketing Specialist, Upper Thames River  
Conservation Authority  
Carey, Bonnie - Community Relations Supervisor,  
Longwoods Conservation Area

**Nature Appreciation**

Haggeman, John - St. Clair National Wildlife Area  
King, Gail - Stratford Field Naturalists  
Martin, Dan - Arborist, Stratford  
Prieksaitis, Marjorie - West Elgin Nature Club  
Wake, Winnie - McIlwraith Field Naturalists

**Human Heritage Appreciation**

Carey, Bonnie - Community Relations Supervisor,  
Longwoods Conservation Area  
Colquhoun, Debbie - Highland Games, Chatham  
Fletcher, Sue - Curator, Beachville Museum  
Gilbert, Lisa and Jim - Heritage Days, Chatham  
Johnson, Sheila - Curator, Woodstock Museum  
Logan, Hugh - Director of Culture and Recreation,  
Chatham  
Lovell, Shirley - Curator, Ingersoll Cheese Factory Museums  
Luscio, Joe - Kent Military Re-enactment Society  
Major, Dan - Director of Parks and Recreation, Woodstock  
Ollivier, Luanne - Village Manager, Fanshawe Pioneer Village  
Raynor, Laurie Ann - Historic Downtown Marketing  
Co-ordinator, Chatham  
Riddick, Shirley - Curator, Beachville Museum  
Sholtz, Karen - Festival Office, Stratford

# Chapter 28

## Conclusion

Community meetings were hosted early in 1996 to explore the feasibility of nominating the Thames as a CHR. The consensus from the participants at those early meetings was that the river was worthy of designation based upon its human heritage and recreation values; while most agreed natural heritage was of national significance as well, it was recognized the river could not be nominated on that basis because of impoundments.

The Thames River Background Study has confirmed these early assumptions. Natural heritage, human heritage and recreation values are of outstanding importance both locally and nationally and meet several of the CHRS Values Guidelines as defined in Canadian Heritage Rivers System: Objectives, Principles and Procedures. The following specific points support this conclusion:

### Natural Heritage

- The Thames was one of the first rivers to form following the retreat of the last glacier from Ontario. The river's upper reaches still follow the ancient spillways while the lower reach emerged after thousands of years as a glacial lake.
- The Thames is the only major river in Canada with the majority of its watershed in the Carolinian Life Zone. The region is recognized nationally as one of the most biologically diverse areas with more than 2200 species of vascular plants.
- The watershed sustains the largest diversity of clams and one of the most diverse fish communities in Canada, as well as supporting the threatened Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle.

### Human Heritage

- The Thames has provided the setting for 11,000 years of Aboriginal and European settlement.
- The Thames watershed was a major theatre during the War of 1812 including the Battle of Longwoods, Tecumseh's death and the Battle of Moraviantown.
- The Thames watershed supported the first successful commercial agrarian society in Canada, based on the wheat staple.
- Watermill sites along the river became the focus for settlement in London, Chatham, Stratford, Woodstock as well as a network of other small towns and villages.
- London is the product of Lieutenant-Governor

Simcoe's vision for 'the Forks' as the capital of Upper Canada.

- Individuals linked to the river include Tecumseh, Thomas Talbot, John Carling, John Labatt, Amelia Harris, Paul Peel, Adam Beck, Arthur Meighan and, more recently, Tom Patterson, Silken Laumann and Marnie McBean.

### Recreation

- The diversity of boating opportunities is significant and includes such forms as canoeing, kayaking, sailing, power-boating, yachting and high performance rowing. The London Canoe Club is the largest canoe club in Canada, and the Tornado Boardsailing Club at Pittock Lake is the oldest boardsailing club in the nation.
- Sport fishing is carried out by thousands of local residents who enjoy the scenic value of the river valley, its accessibility, and the diversity of fish species.
- Such hiking trails as the Thames Valley Trail and the Avon Trail link to provincial trail networks including the Bruce. Other multi-use urban trails situated within the floodplain provide recreational opportunities for walkers, cyclers, roller-bladers and cross-country skiers.
- The Carolinian Life Zone provides a unique and diverse environment for naturalists and researchers. There are five naturalist clubs in the watershed and the McIlwraith Field Naturalists of London Incorporated is the oldest club in Canada.
- The Thames watershed provides many opportunities for heritage appreciation including Aboriginal villages (Ska-Nah-Doht), pioneer settlements (Fanshawe Pioneer Village), military re-enactments (Heritage Days, Chatham) and pow wows.
- Both the Stratford Shakespearean Festival and the National High Performance Rowing Centre at Fanshawe Lake are individual examples of nationally significant recreation attractions.

### Assessment of Integrity Guidelines

Three Integrity Guidelines have been established as criteria for designation as a Canadian Heritage River. The Thames meets each of these values:

- As described through the presentation of natural heritage values, the river is of sufficient size and composition to demonstrate the key aspects of features and processes which give the Thames its outstanding values; its ability to sustain threatened and endangered species and its presence within the highly productive Carolinian Floristic Region support this conclusion.
- As described through the presentation of natural

heritage values, the river contains ecosystem components necessary for sustainability of the valued features; biotic diversity and the presence of endangered species within this highly settled and developed landscape suggest the watershed has an exceptional capacity to support ecosystem features and functions.

- Continual improvements in water quality during the past twenty years coupled with increasing community awareness and concern for the health of the aquatic system suggest water quality will support and enhance the valued features of the watershed.

## Recommendation

The Thames River Background Study has documented natural heritage, human heritage and recreation values within the watershed. Based upon this weight of evidence, it is recommended that, with the concurrence and advice of Parks Ontario and Parks Canada, the TRCC proceed with the preparation of a formal nomination document so that the Province of Ontario might then be prepared to recommend to the CHRS Board in February 1998 that the Thames River be nominated as a Canadian Heritage River based upon its Human Heritage and Recreational values (Natural Heritage being excluded due to the presence of impoundments).