Bob McMullen Trail

Trail Heads
Chopin St. at Hamilton St.
Bishop St. at Hamilton St.

Length
3.2km

Parking
Preston Memorial Arena
Chopin St. Parking Lot

Surface
Stonedust

Washroom
Available at nearby restaurants and arena when open

GPS
Chopin St:
N43.3971, W80.36660

Bishop St:
N43.38766, W80.34844

Grand River along Linear Trail
Limestone bluffs
The confluence of the Grand and Speed Rivers
What land use pattern can you detect at this location? The area now occupied by the apartments and townhouses was an industrial site since the early 19th century. It was first [1805 – 1832] part of John Erb's farm property. The first building erected near this spot was a tannery, operated by Isaac Salyers. In 1866 Henry Bernhardt purchased the lot for $400 and eventually this became the site of the Bernhardt Rock Brewery. During the Prohibition Era, 9% beer was produced for sale in the USA. Rumour suggests that a remnant of the original spring still flows through the bedrock. Dumped fill hides the original cliff face.

Now for some natural history. What physical feature do you see across the river? You see dolomitic limestone cliffs that were formed about 450 million years ago. These outcrops are the result of reefs created when this entire area was part of the Michigan Basin, a tropical sea. These Silurian marine rocks contain an abundance of marine invertebrate fossils. Some of these ancient colonial organisms built the reefs which you are now looking at.

Early settlers required fording places over the rivers for their horses and wagons. Ellis Little (1988) states that Nathaniel Dodge built a log cabin in the 1790s on the hill near the present location of Cruickston Park. Settlers followed a small creek down to the Grand and then crossed over the Dodge's property. Bridge building caused this ford to be abandoned by 1820. Little locates the ford “just past the Sewage Plant on Lowther St. at Linear Park.”

Around 1839 Jacob Hespeler dug a “hydraulic canal,” a pond and a “tail race.” Mrs. Erb's refusal to grant certain water taking rights ended his plans to build a grist mill on the Grand. You will walk along the canal wall today all the way to the confluence of the rivers. Hespeler’s next step was to buy land and build on King St. In 1845 he bought land with water privileges from Abraham Clemens and moved again. Guess where?

Welcome to the confluence of the Speed and Grand Rivers. An 1845 map places Joseph Bechtels buildings near this location. Otto Klotz claims that Preston merchants built a bridge across the Grand River.

Look for the poles supporting wires across the river. Now, look around and find the earthen “berm.” In 1858 a bridge for the Preston-Berlin Railway carried the tracks across the Speed River. Two years later, ice damaged the bridge and the company folded.

In 1863, two Americans, Abbey and Risley, leased land from Joseph Erb and set up a hop yard. John D. Moore eventually owned some of the fields. By 1900 the hop fields included almost all of the land bordered by the river, Argyle St. and Hamilton St. Several hundred First Nations People from Brantford were employed each August to pick the hops.

Heise's sawmill was located near Queenston Rd. in this block. It was later moved closer to the hop fields.

As you approach the end of the trail, look across the river. In 1807 John Erb built Preston's first grist mill beside a sawmill built the previous year. The site of this grist mill, now called Dover Mills, is the oldest continuously operating industrial site in the Region of Waterloo. A hamlet known as Cambridge Mills grew up around the mill and was the first urban settlement in the region.