



QUESTION:

What has nearly 100km of historic wilderness trails, 20 pristine lakes, diverse wildlife habitats, and is only half an hour north of Dwight?

Limberlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve

by Dianne Horton

The Limberlost Forest and Wildlife Reserve is a privately sponsored nature reserve that is open year-round to the public at no cost, six days a week (closed on Wednesdays). The recent restoration of Limberlost's wilderness trails enables nature enthusiasts to explore, year-round, this truly unique property in a safe and ecologically sensitive way.



enjoy the stunning vantage points overlooking the surrounding forests and pristine lakes.

Working mostly on weekends, 70km of hiking trails have been upgraded, ranking them among the very best in the country. A further 30km have been partially restored but are currently in medium to rough condition.

With nearly 100km of high quality trails, hikers enjoy access to twenty pristine lakes, diverse wildlife habitats and a variety of natural features, ensuring that there is always something new to discover with family and friends. The current custodians of Limberlost feel privileged to participate in the restoration of this property's historic wilderness trails, and to make them available to members of the local community.

The trail system qualifies Limberlost as a sustainable forest wildlife reserve, which is distinct from a park. Parks are designed essentially for human recreation, whereas Limberlost is dedicated to plant and animal life, with human intrusion confined largely to its trails and forestry roads. These, together with cottage clearings and beachfront areas, represent less than one percent of the reserve's land area.

By maintaining well-groomed trails, visitors to Limberlost are encouraged to remain on the established routes to avoid damaging animal habitats and plant growth. Furthermore, large segments of Limberlost experience virtually no human activity, including designated wetlands and the secluded valleys in the western and southern quadrants of the property.

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Bobbie Burns is the individual credited with laying out the original system of hiking trails at Limberlost, nearly 100 years ago. In his early twenties, Bobbie Burns acquired land to farm next to Limberlost where he built a cabin on the east side of Poverty Lake in 1907. After farming proved unproductive, he decided to devote his life to developing and maintaining a network of trails, which at their peak were reported to exceed 150km. He also acted as a hiking, hunting, and fishing guide for guests staying at the Limberlost Lodge.

Starting in the early 1990s, local cottagers began volunteering their time to restore and upgrade Limberlost's hiking trails. The initial objective was to make the trails safer and easier for visitors wishing to

PRINCIPAL TRAILS	KM	STEPS
Solitaire	13.0	16,400
Buck Lake	8.5	10,700
High Lake	9.0	11,300
Turtle Lake	8.0	10,100
Kalonga Wetland	11.0	13,800
Crystal Falls	7.7	8,750
Lookout	5.0	6,300
Ski Hill	4.2	5,250
Echo Rock	5.5	7,000
LOWER QUALITY TRAILS		
Backwoods/Pointe	1.5	1,900
Ascencion	1.5	1,900
Helve	1.5	1,900
Hickory Creek	0.5	650
Hickory Lake	6.0	7,650
McReynold Valley	8.0	10,100

opposite page: More than two thirds of the trails on the Limberlost Reserve are groomed and qualify as high quality trails, as opposed to rugged hiking paths.



Visitors will note from the variety of animal tracks on the hiking trails that both large and small mammals use them to ease their movement between foraging areas, fresh water, and the areas where they bed down.

Due to the quality of the trails, artists, wildlife photographers, and bird watchers are able to walk silently through the forest and wetland meadows without being concerned about snapping twigs or rustling leaves that could forewarn animals and birds of their approach.

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During the course of restoring the trails, a number of unique natural and heritage features were discovered, which have been described in the *Master Trail Guide*. Information boards found in the Hilltop Visitors Centre overlooking Lake Solitaire also guide visitors on where to explore.

Limberlost's trails were initially designed to speed horseback riders through the property and into Algonquin Park. In time, however, hikers and cross-country skiers became their main users and safety became increasingly important. Today, safety continues to be the highest priority. Upon arrival at Limberlost, visitors are reminded about the importance of safety and are asked to read and sign a Safety Responsibility Contract.


In order to protect hikers, cross-country skiers, and wildlife on the woodland roads, vehicles are required to be left at one of a number of centrally located parking areas. Each of these is within a short walk to the start of a major hiking trail.

To a large extent the major trails are linked with each other, thus enabling visitors to expand the length of their hikes to whatever distance they desire, assured that they can find their way back with minimal difficulty along a trail or woodland road to their starting point.

GPS readings listed in the *Master Trail Guide* help visitors locate the major points of interest. These also assist visitors who detour from the prepared trails, which is generally not encouraged, to return safely.

More than two thirds of the hiking and cross-country ski trails are groomed and of the highest quality, as opposed to rugged hiking paths. As such, they are also suitable for joggers as well as individuals who prefer to enjoy nature at their leisure.

For those who like to venture away from the shoreline of the lakes, the Kalonga Valley Trail can be joined from either the Solitaire Trail or the Helve Trail. The valley floor offers many opportunities to observe birdlife and large and small mammals, and follows a series of thirteen active beaver dams.

Limberlost's *Master Trail Guide* is available for sale at the office near the entrance gates for \$5, with all proceeds donated to Trails Youth Initiatives. This organization has its northern campus at Limberlost where it conducts outdoor programs for inner-city youth. For more information about the Youth Trails Initiatives, visit www.trails.ca or www.limberlostlodges.com to plan your next hike. 

above: The ice cliffs on Buck lake are a spectacular sight on this winter wonderland trail.