

Section 5: Colonel Samuel Smith Park Restoration Projects

Shoreline Extension

I want to highlight the impressive restoration project that transformed Colonel Samuel Smith Park into the thriving ecosystem we see today. The edge of the forested area we exited earlier marks the original shoreline and boundary of Lakeshore Grounds. The difference in tree height here compared to the adjacent area serves as visible evidence of recent plantings and ongoing restoration efforts.

The park extension, spanning 1500 feet, began in the 1970s and culminated in 1996 with the incorporation of bricks salvaged from demolished Toronto buildings as the park's foundation. Over the years, nature has reclaimed this new landscape, nurturing a diverse ecosystem. Initially plants took root, creating habitats for various animals, while migrating birds introduced new plant species to the area. Another community organization, Citizens Concerned About the Future of the Etobicoke Waterfront or CCFEW, was instrumental in establishing the naturalization and wilderness design of Colonel Samuel Smith Park.

The extension project was crucial, not only for its ecological benefits but also for its social and recreational importance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, parks like Colonel Samuel Smith served as vital spaces for socialization and exercise, highlighting their role in mental and physical well-being.

For those interested in volunteering, opportunities are available with the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the City of Toronto, or Friends of Sam Smith Park (FOSS) throughout the year. To learn more about the park, there are various informative signage installations throughout its grounds that provide insights into its history and ecological significance.

Continue walking straight down this path until you reach the skating trail.

Skating Trail

We're now heading towards another notable restoration project within Colonel Samuel Smith Park.

Opened in 2010, the 250 meter long trail was Toronto's first official skating trail, although now similar trails can be found throughout the city. Designed by the landscape architecture firm PMA Landscape Architects, the primary goal of this project was to honor and showcase the park's diverse wildlife and vegetation. Significant efforts were made to preserve existing trees while introducing native plantings and seedlings to create new habitats. During the winter, Friends of Sam Smith Park put out feeders around the trail for the birds.

Adjacent to the skating trail stands the Powerhouse, a substantial brick building constructed in 1888. Originally, this building burned coal to generate energy and provide warmth for the cottages during the early days of the Psychiatric Hospital. Today it has been retrofitted to offer a warm place for visitors to put on their skates.

Originally, this skating trail wasn't always intended to be here. First mentioned in a 1996 Master Plan for Lakeshore Grounds as a pleasure skating track, it took over a decade before the city actively began considering its implementation around 2008. Initially, there were discussions about creating a skateboard park. However this plan was shut down, and the skating trail was actually supposed to be built northwest of the Powerhouse. Community feedback suggested this would be more environmentally harmful than its current location, which is now southwest of the Powerhouse. Whether you're a novice or an expert skater, it's a fantastic place to enjoy skating in a natural setting.

As a fascinating film history tidbit, this skating trail was featured in the show *Designated Survivor*, starring Kiefer Sutherland, son of the late Donald Sutherland. In the show, Kiefer's character becomes President after several people ahead of him in line are killed. If you're interested, we offer a Film History Tour that can be booked through our website, showcasing the various film projects shot here on campus.

Let's continue down the path parallel to the parking lot, cross the street, and then turn right to follow the sidewalk back toward the Student Resource and Welcome Centre.