

Huronia

Sand, sun and water

Balanced on the edge of the Canadian Shield, the Huronia District is a mixture of rocky highlands and more gentle rolling terrain. It is a region that combines the granite-shouldered, island-dotted shore of Georgian Bay and the bedrock uplands of the Haliburton Highlands and Algonquin with the fertile plains of the Holland Marsh and the rolling farm country of Simcoe.

Naturally, this is mostly sugar maple and big pine country, dotted in its northern sections with clear lakes and fast-flowing streams. At its heart is Lake Simcoe, a recreational hotspot loved by thousands of boaters and anglers. But the region also includes a number of unusual ecosystems, ranging from sand dunes and alvars – rock barrens that support very specialized plant species – to large wetlands such as the Minesing Swamp.

The sandy terrain of Simcoe County might be best represented by the long white crescent of Wasaga Beach on Georgian Bay. Behind the well-known beach is a much less recognized dune system – probably the largest in Ontario. The rare and uncommon species found in these dunes are protected in Wasaga Provincial Park, which is also a great place to see butterflies.

One of the larger parks in Huronia is Awenda at the tip of the Penetanguishene Peninsula. The oak-pine-maple woods of the park are a great place to see wildflowers in the spring and for bird lovers, the park attracts a great mix of northern and southern species.

The Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre is also located on the peninsula. Protecting a 1,200-hectare open-water marsh, it is a great place to explore the beauty and intricacy of wetlands. Take part in a guided canoe tour or just stroll along one of the boardwalks running through the cattails.

Of course, the biggest protected area in the region is Algonquin, covering the high dome of the Canadian Shield. The park's west side is known for its rich hardwood forests that still contain big maples, yellow birch and beech despite a long history of logging. Old-growth stands of white and red pine can also be found in the park's northwest corner and on the edge of the panhandle that extends south from the main body of the park.

Just south of Algonquin lies the Leslie M. Frost Natural Resource Centre. This managed natural area offers canoe routes and trails for those interested in exploring the rugged Haliburton Highlands.

On the Georgian Bay shoreline to the east is Georgian Bay Islands National Park. The 60 islands in the park range from bare rock knobs to well-forested habitats that support a diversity of species. The park is particularly well known for its reptiles and amphibians, including a reclusive population of eastern massasauga rattlesnakes.

These are just some of the great nature spots in Huronia, a district with a well-deserved reputation as a natural playground. Whether it's kayaking on the crystal clear waters of Georgian Bay or watching a moose graze in a wetland along an Algonquin Park trail, this area has it all for nature lovers.