

# Ontario East

## East Meets North

The rugged eastern reaches of Ontario contain both a wealth of natural history and a legacy of stories about Canada's early settlement. From the great pineries of the Ottawa valley to the distinct limestone outcrops of the lower Frontenac region, this area has the character, in many ways, of the more northern areas. That's because it is here that the billion-year-old bedrock of the Canadian Shield dips south through what is known as the Frontenac Axis and crosses under the St. Lawrence River.

Typical of Shield country, the area is studded with lakes, crosscrossed by rivers and well forested. For nature lovers, this means a chance to explore by canoe or on foot areas that still boast a wild flavour. The north end of the region includes the east side of Algonquin Provincial Park, an area of big lakes, big pines and, often, fewer visitors. Algonquin's system of lakes has made it a world-renowned destination for canoeists in particular. The park is also home to a whole suite of wild species, including moose, black bear and what may be North America's largest wolf population.

In the Ottawa River Valley, the remains of ancient glacial lakes form the valley's deep sand and clay plains. Great stands of white and red pine once grew on these lands – some said to be many metres in diameter. These trees were used to make masts for the ships of the British navy or into clean-grained, metre-wide planks for simple pioneer construction. But despite the seemingly endless forests of big trees, it actually took only a few decades for most of the big pines to be cut. However, a few examples of what the forests of this valley looked like when settlers first arrived can be found in places such as Shaw Woods north of Eganville and Gilles Grove in the town of Arnprior.

For a taste of the big pine forests that once dominated the east side of Algonquin Park and the valley, it's worth the trip into the park's Lake Lavielle wilderness zone. The area can only be reached by canoe, but as the newest wilderness area and the only wilderness zone on the park's unique east side, it is worth the trek.

At the southern edge of the region lies the St. Lawrence River Valley. The park system managed by the St. Lawrence Parks Commission along this aquatic artery is a great place for viewing waterfowl as well as shorebirds and gulls. Bald eagles can also be seen along the river and, of course, there are the views of the mighty St. Lawrence itself to savour.

While this region was one of the earliest areas in central Canada to be settled, the rocky soils and rough topography have ensured that much of the original pattern of woods, wetlands and waters remains. This high degree of natural cover has led to the idea of establishing a natural corridor joining Algonquin Park to the huge Adirondack wilderness in New York State. Planning and community discussions have begun and there is much excitement about the possibilities for linking two of the largest remaining natural areas in the lower Great Lakes region.