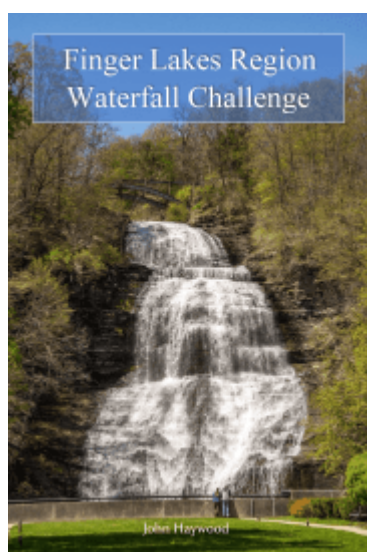


# DIG THE FALLS

## Chasing Waterfalls - Finger Lakes Waterfall Challenge

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The Finger Lakes Waterfall Challenge began in the fall of 2019 and is based on the book Finger Lakes Region Waterfall Challenge by John Haywood. Inside you'll find numerous maps and listings for almost 50 waterfalls. From locations in New York State parks to local community parks and everything in between, you will find amazing locations with beautiful waterfalls. Some are very easy to see since they are beside the road and others will require a bit more effort but, without a doubt, this is a challenge well worth your time.



My copy of the book arrived in early November and I started laying out plans to accomplish all the visits. For me, the nearest points in the Finger Lakes region require just under a 3-hour drive so each trip will have quite a few stops. I was off work during Christmas week and, since we had pretty decent weather for December, my youngest son & I decided to visit our first batch of waterfalls. Tompkins County and six waterfalls around Seneca Lake were our destination for the day.

We started out the day around 7am with lunch, snacks, & drinks all packed and headed for Taughannock Falls State Park in Trumansburg. There are two locations to view this stunning waterfall - the Falls Overlook (you will see signs pointing the way from Route 89 along Cayuga Lake) or the Gorge Trail which begins from the parking area within the park grounds. If you choose to visit the overlook first, be sure to adhere to the parking signs indicating where & for how long parking is allowed. When visiting the Gorge Trail, parking options are either in a small lot to the west of Rt. 89 or the main parking area on the park

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grounds. Since this is a NY State Park, there is a seasonal fee. Be sure to check the NY State Park website for current information & rates.



A short walk from the parking area, the Falls Overlook area offers panoramic views of the falls, gorge and creek. Be sure to stop in the new welcome center where you'll find more information about the park and the Ithaca area. If you choose to hike the North Rim Trail, the Falls Overlook is right on the trail and the view is breathtaking. The  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile long Gorge Trail is a fairly level and easy path to walk. With the gorge walls along the trail soaring 400 feet above, your eyes travel upwards to take in the grandeur all around you. Soon enough you'll hear the crashing of the 215-foot waterfall which is nearly three times taller than Niagara Falls. Once you cross the bridge over Taughannock Creek, the public accessible area takes you close to the base of the falls where the force of falling water will begin dropping its spray on you. There were very few others on the day of our visit but you can be sure this is much busier during the summer and fall.

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The next park we are heading towards is Buttermilk Falls State Park. Like Taughannock, there are picnic grounds to enjoy and the very popular Gorge Trail. During the summer months, there is a swimming area as well. Due to seasonal closings, we were not able to walk the gorge as we had on previous visits but the main waterfall is seen as soon as you pull into the park. The NY State Park website will provide up-to-date information on rates and trail conditions so be sure to check it out before you visit.



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We opted not to stop at the third NY State Park in Ithaca, Robert H. Treman State Park, but we'll be back to visit that one another day. Instead, we headed west towards Seneca Lake and four more waterfalls.

The southern end of Seneca Lake is home to numerous waterfalls and it's here, in the village of Montour Falls, that my son & I stopped to visit three of them ... Deckertown Falls, She-Qua-Ga Falls, and Aunt Sarah's Falls. All of these are within a few minutes' drive of each other, too.

Deckertown Falls is at the end of a quiet residential street and has its own designated parking area. Please be respectful of those who live nearby. Park only where allowed and

stay off the private property that's posted along the path.

Just as with many other smaller waterfalls, Deckertown Falls was once home to a grist mill. You'll see the remains of the foundation near the parking area. This isn't a difficult path to walk but you need to be mindful that you will be close to the edge sometimes so use care.



Our second stop in the village is the spectacular She-Qua-Ga Falls. This one is easily seen from the roadside but I highly recommend parking around the corner on West Main Street and walking to the small park so you can view this up close. Take advantage of the benches along the paved walkway to sit and soak up the sounds of the water. After this visit we headed up the road a few minutes to Aunt Sarah's Falls.



Right along the very busy Route 14, you'll find Aunt Sarah's Falls on the west side of the road and a dedicated parking area on the eastern side along with signs welcoming you to the village of Montour Falls. Local legend tells that this waterfall is named after the Seneca wife of a pioneer who jumped over the falls to her death. A grim tale for sure but don't let that detract from the beauty of this spot. The flow of this waterfall tends to slow down in the summer so springtime or just after a heavy rain are great times to visit.





Our last planned stop for this trip is Hector Falls. If you follow Rt. 414 along the eastern side of Seneca Lake, you'll drive right to it. Look for signs indicating the hamlet of Hector Falls and you'll know you're in the right spot.

There isn't a dedicated parking lot to view this waterfall so your only option is on the side of the road. Use caution as there is a good amount of traffic that drives by. Once you've successfully navigated the traffic, the bridge offers a beautiful straight-on view. If you're more daring, others have climbed over the guardrail and made their way down to the creek bed so they are looking directly up at the falls.

It's worth mentioning that the lower portion of this waterfall, the section after it passes below the Rt. 414 bridge, is on private property and access is not allowed.



Our road trip ended here and we both had a great day. How could it not be with six waterfalls, right?

Even though it wasn't a stop on this particular trip, I wanted to share about when my son & I visited Honeoye Falls in the village of the same name, which is south of Rochester. This waterfall, like so many in the region, was used to power various mills. Each of the buildings on either side of the crest were a mill in their previous life. One is now a private residence and the other is occupied by the offices for the Town of Mendon. Parking and a viewing area with a few historical plaques is available on West Main Street. Walking just past the town offices you'll find a small public access area to view the falls. A bench offers visitors a spot to relax and enjoy the sounds.



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The Finger Lakes Region has so much to offer ... and waterfalls are only the beginning. Hopefully these six spots have tempted you to check out the book and explore this unique area.

Until next time

~Donna

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