

Utica-area Waterfall Road Trip

by Donna McCabe



Do you get excited about the idea of seeing waterfalls? What about when one is only open for public access twice a year? That definitely got my attention and I immediately had to find out more!

The waterfall I'm referring to is Trenton Falls located in Barneveld, NY which is about 20 minutes north of Utica.

From the early 1800's, this land was privately owned by John Sherman and his family. They built a hotel in 1850 which drew many of the country's elite as guests for almost fifty years until the land was purchased by Utica Light & Power Company in 1897. Since then, public access has been restricted. That all changed in 2004 when the Trenton Falls Scenic Trail was created and the public once again had access to view the falls albeit only twice a year - once in the Spring and once in the Fall.

Once I found out all this information my curiosity was piqued and I had to plan a trip even though it was a three-hour drive away. As my plans were being made, my thoughts ran to what else is in the area that I can visit to make the trip even better and hopefully raise my numbers in the NYS Waterfall Challenge. The map in my copy of Waterfalls of New York State showed about four or five other waterfalls relatively close by so I eagerly added them to my plans. I tentatively planned to visit a total of 5 waterfalls in one day but that all depended on the weather and how long each visit lasted but I was more than ready for the challenge.

When Trenton Falls is open, the hours are 9am to 5pm, and given we have a three-hour drive to get there, my husband & I decided to drive to Utica Friday after work to stay overnight so we could be at the trail early in the morning to hopefully avoid what I expected

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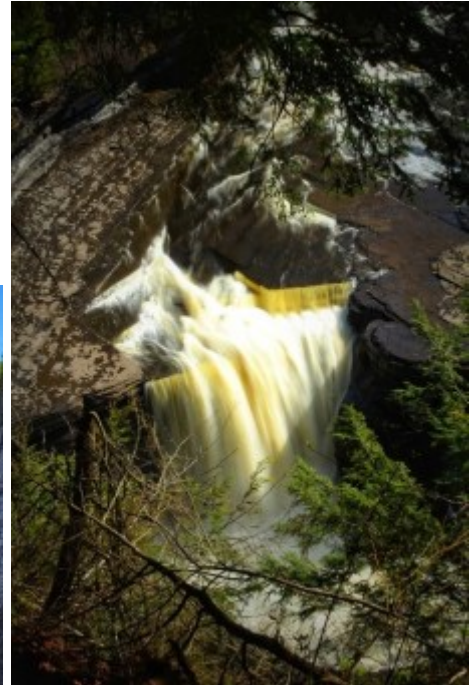
to be a large number of visitors later in the day. We arrived about thirty minutes before they opened so we walked down the road to Morgan Dam. The sun was already shining bright so I knew it would be a beautiful day and I couldn't wait to explore.



The property is welcoming to the public with gravel walkways that wind along the gorge and throughout the property, fences line the overlook areas, and there were plenty of guides to share information with visitors or answer questions. A couple of the falls were a bit hard to see because of tree growth but that was easy to move on from when you see the massive forms that held the wooden pipes that carried the water. A couple of platforms have been created between these structures that allow visitors clear views of the gorge and falls. At the end of the trail is a trio of waterfalls that will take your breath away. I spent quite a bit of time here just taking in the power of the water, the amazing view, and listening to other visitor's reactions. I was definitely not alone in appreciating the beauty.

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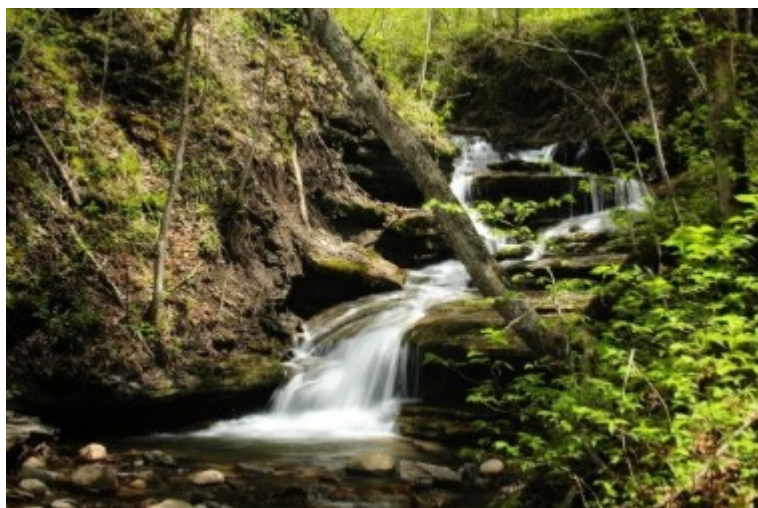


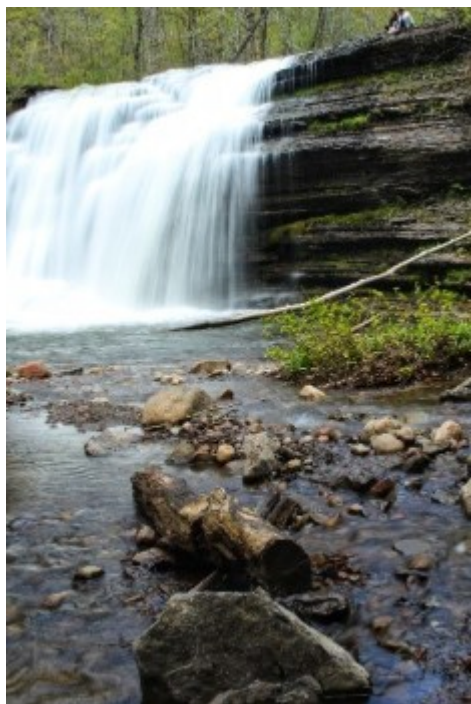
The trail itself is about two miles round trip and, other than a couple of staircases, isn't strenuous at all. You're welcome to go at your own pace to linger and enjoy the grounds. Our visit lasted about 2 ½ hours and then we were off to our next stop.

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My plans had us heading north to Booneville to Pixley Falls State Park. While this is a NY State Park, it's only a day-use park so there isn't an entry fee. We weren't sure what area would give us the best view of the falls but we quickly found our way to a small parking area that has trails leading you right to the bottom of the big falls. Off to the side you'll see one of the smaller cascades and I think it was my favorite of the day.





Luckily for my husband, there was a picnic table he could sit at while he waited for me to finish taking pictures. We chose to head back up to our car in a different direction than we came down and that led us to another small cascade. I originally thought there was only one waterfall located here but there are several smaller falls so be sure to walk around to see them all. There are tables & grills available, too, so think about bringing a picnic to add to your visit.

Our third stop was along NY 12D to see Talcottville Falls. Right before the bridge crosses over Sugar River, you'll see evidence of a pull-off spot and tracks that lead down to the water. After walking down the slight hill, the tracks go to the left and lead to the upper portion of the falls. There are some shale ledges you can climb down that get you closer to the water and along the river. Given all the recent rain, this was flowing pretty heavily.



We walked back up the tire tracks to where we initially came down and turned toward the river where we could see the lower portion of the falls. Most of this was in the full sun but a small section was in the shade and I had a lot of fun taking pictures here. The cascades were gentler in this area than those in the middle of the river and the plants growing nearby added some great color.

Up next and about 10 minutes away is our fourth stop of the day - Lyons Falls. Before heading to the lower boat launch, we pulled into an area at the very top of the falls which allows you to look straight across all the roiling water. I was able to walk out a bit and you could almost feel the rumble as the water tumbled down and there was nothing gentle about it. The parking area at the lower boat launch leads you right to a sand & smooth-stone beach type area. From here you'll see the falls in full along with the buildings of a hydro

facility. We lingered a bit along the shore then headed out to our final stop – Whitaker Falls.



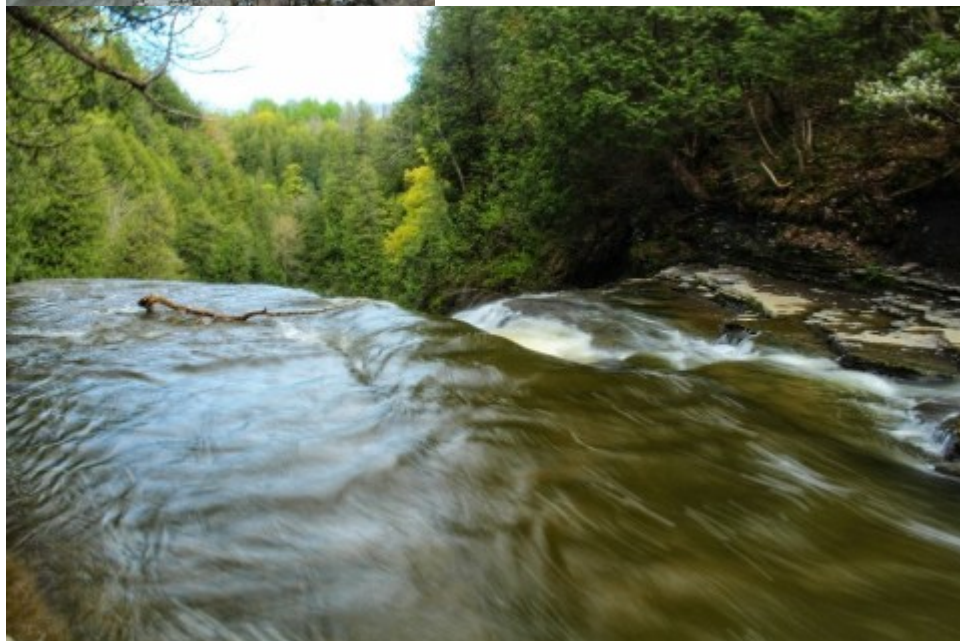
While on the road to Whitaker Falls in Lowville, we passed through the hamlet of Glenfield and spotted a waterfall back off the road a little bit. We decided to turn around and ask the property owners for permission to get a closer look at the falls. While I was taking pictures, my husband chatted with Lance and Harold who live on either side of where the Whetstone Creek meets the Black River. Both men were generous with their time and shared many personal stories and stories of the falls. Harold's late wife grew up in the house he lives in and he spoke about a mill that used be there. This waterfall turned out to be the best stop of the day. Seeing a private waterfall was great but meeting these two gentlemen and hearing their stories ... I couldn't ask for anything better.



We got back on our way and headed to Whitaker Falls Park which was just up the road. This park offers day use options along with camping sites. There is a set of stairs just off the main road that leads down to the creek bed. We followed this up quite a bit and saw a few of the smaller cascades. Eventually we climbed up off the creek bed and headed to see if we could find an access point to see the larger falls. The steeper sections of the gorge have some very rustic railings so you'll need to be careful along the edge. We found another access point to get to the creek bed but with the spring water levels so high, there wasn't a safe way to walk down past the big falls. We made another attempt a bit further down but decided not to go all the way since getting back up was going to be too hard. This park is a hidden gem as the grounds were well maintained and the views from the picnic shelter were spectacular.

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This was our second trip seeing five waterfalls (well, really six) in one day and my thoughts are still the same ... I love how they are all unique and each has something fascinating about them. It could be the history, the location, what effort is required to see them or the neighbors who will tell you about them. Get out there and explore. You'll be amazed at what you find!

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