



FAB EXPERIENCES

Eastern Ontario, Canada

Defining a Nation



Even in the centuries before Europeans came to North America, the St. Lawrence River and Great Lakes were natural boundaries between First Nations peoples before they became a boundary between nations. The Thousand Islands, the Garden of the Great Spirit, came to be shared by First Nations peoples, at the edge of traditional territories.

The first settlement on the upper St. Lawrence was on the site that would become Kingston. Built in 1673, Fort Frontenac was a fortified trading post. Its strategic location controlled the north channel entrance to the river and Lake Ontario, and was a safe harbor to launch patrols and trade. For the next nearly two centuries, the locations for fortifications on points of land on both sides of the Cataraqui River at Kingston would be tested by the wills and militaries of nations as they sought power over trade and lands.

This tour will take you to the various sites of military installations and conflicts in this upper part of the St. Lawrence, and Thousand Islands. No war is a cause for celebration, but the sites have a tremendous value in learning and remembering their effect on settlement and development of the region.

1. Murney Tower

Lat: 44.222292
Long: -76.490296

Address:
King St. W, at Barrie

Tel: 613-572-5181

Notes:

The British military new a good thing when they saw it. In February 1794, two British warships, 74 guns and 32 guns, unsuccessfully attacked a barrel-shaped stone tower at Mortella Point in Corsica. The tower eventually fell to land-based forces after two days of heavy fighting. The British were held off by the tower's two eighteen pounders that fired seaward. Vice-Admiral Hood reported: "...The Fortitude and Juno were ordered against it, without making the least impression by a continued cannonade of two hours and a half; and the former ship being very much damaged by red-hot shot, both hauled off..." Such towers were adopted by the British in many places, and four were built as part of the defenses at Kingston. One sits on Cedar Island near the fort, and the others are built in a line westward and lake-ward from Fort Henry along the shoreline. The westernmost, called the Murney Tower, is open as a museum.

Driving Directions: From Green Woods Inn, travel south on Highway 15 for about 5km. Turn right onto Highway 2, for 2km into downtown Kingston. Turn right onto Queen St., then take the first left onto King St. E. About 1.5km to MacDonald Park, on the left.

2. Fort Frontenac

Lat: 44.233590
Long: -76.479019

Notes:

The original fort, a crude, wooden palisade structure, was called Fort Catarauqui but was later named for the Governor of New France, Louis de Buade de Frontenac – Count Frontenac. Fort Frontenac was to control the fur trade in the Great Lakes and northward, and to discourage the English who were competing for control of the trade. Another function of the fort was the provision of supplies and reinforcements to other French installations on the Great Lakes. Frontenac, who largely financed the fort and settlement himself, hoped that the trade done at the fort would repay his investment. Friction between the French and the Iroquois arose because of rivalries in the fur trade. Several Iroquois, including women and children, until then friendly to the French, were captured and imprisoned at Fort Frontenac. Fort Oswego was built by the British across the lake from Fort Frontenac in 1722 to compete with Fort Frontenac. By the 1750s Fort Frontenac essentially served only as a supply storage depot and harbour for French naval vessels, and its garrison had dwindled. In 1758, the British under Lieutenant-Colonel John Brdastreet left Fort Oswego with a force of a little over 3000 men and captured Fort Frontenac. The British would eventually build Fort Henry, better positioned on higher ground across the bay.

Driving Directions: Go back down King St. about 1.2km to Princess St., turn right. After about 120m, turn left onto Ontario St. Park near the K-Rock Centre, walk to the east side of the K-Rock Centre to the ruins of Fort Frontenac.

Explore more at: frontenacarchbiosphere.ca

3. Fort Henry

Lat: 44.225400
Long: -76.454170

Address:
1 Fort Henry Dr, Kingston

Tel: 613-542-7388

Email: getaway
@parks.on.ca

The original Fort Henry was built at the outset of the War of 1812 – 1814, to repel probable attacks by American forces against the naval dockyards at Kingston. The fort as seen today was built between 1832 and 1837, as tension between Britain and the US grew. The fort, and the accompanying four Martello Towers, were an imposing defense system at the entrance of the also newly built Rideau Canal, and the upper St. Lawrence, and became the strongest fortification west of Quebec City in Canada. In fact, the fort – both the 1812 version and the present fort – was never attacked. Today Fort Henry is a National Historic Site, and part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site with the Rideau Canal. It is operated by the St. Lawrence Parks Commission.

Driving directions: Continue east on Highway 2, about 1km. Turn right onto Constantine Dr., and continue on to Fort Henry Dr.

Notes:

4. Chimney Island

Lat: 44.468772
Long: -75.834401

The St. Lawrence River was the only practical transportation route from the east coast to the Great Lakes. During the War of 1812 – 1814, it was quickly apparent how vulnerable that passage was to attacks from either side. The British solution was to escort boats and protect that supply line. Gunboats were built as escorts – shallow draft for the myriad of shoals in the Thousand Islands, with an easily handled sail rig and yet possible to row, these craft could carry a small cannon or two, as well as a good deckload of cargo. Chimney Island was about a good day's travel upriver from Prescott, and downriver from Kingston. A blockhouse on the island gave a haven of protection, and rest. The river is deceptively open at this point – there are dozens of rocky shoals around the island, and in the relatively shallow waters between the Canadian and US mainlands here. Approach by attacking ships was far more difficult than it looks. The blockhouse was built behind an earth rampart on the south shore. The chimney was apparently poorly built and filled the building with smoke, so troops often camped on the mainland. The chimney still seen is not that of the blockhouse, but was built from rubble of the original in the early 1900s to remember the old, and long demolished blockhouse.

Driving directions: Drive back to Highway 2, and continue east about 25km to Gananoque. Take King St through Gananoque, and take the 1000 Islands Parkway exit. Drive east on the 1000 Islands Parkway for about 30km. About 2.5km east of Mallorytown Rd., pull off to the side, at Chimney Island (There is a small parking area).

Notes:

Explore more at: frontenacarchbiosphere.ca

5. Blockhouse Island

Lat: 44.587395
Long: -75.680851

In defense of Brockville for the Rebellion of Upper Canada in 1837-1838, a blockhouse was built on a small island at the young village's waterfront. The island was formerly the site of sheds built to house cholera victims, many of whom were immigrants, in the early 1830s. The community was a hive of Loyalist settler activity, with mills at the mouth of Buell's Creek, nearby the island. Destroyed by fire in 1860, the defense was never battle-tested.

Driving directions: From Chimney Island, follow Thousand Islands Parkway about 7km to 401 merge; take first exit (687) to County Rd 2., turn right at end of ramp. Drive east about 10km to downtown Brockville. Turn right onto Market St. W, and drive south to Blockhouse Island.

Notes:

6. Fort Wellington

Lat: 44.713058
Long: -75.509558

Address:
370 Vankoughnet St,
Prescott

Tel: 613-925-2896

Email: ont-wellington
@pc.gc.ca

Fort Wellington was commissioned by the government of Britain during the War of 1812 – 1814 to protect shipping and travellers at the head of the Gallop Rapids in the St. Lawrence River. A series of rapids ran downriver from Prescott, making this an important transfer point to and from ships that could sail above the rapids into Lake Ontario. Shipping of freight and passengers on regular lake ships was impossible through these rapids, and so freight and passengers who travelled downriver to Prescott from Kingston would be “forwarded” to smaller bateaux which could travel through the rapids. Likewise, freight travelling upriver from Montreal would be unloaded from smaller bateaux and loaded onto larger lake ships for carriage upriver. It was originally built in 1813 on land owned by Major Edward Jessup a prominent Loyalist from Connecticut who founded Prescott in 1784. The fort has impressive earth ramparts, reinforced by rows of pointed timbers, called pickets. The massive stone blockhouse and cannons presented a solid defense – probably contributing factors to the fact that Fort Wellington was never attacked. It is preserved and interpreted today as a National Historic Site.

Driving directions: From Brockville, follow King St. east (becomes County Rd. 2) about 20km to Prescott and Fort Wellington on east side of downtown.

Notes:

Explore more at: frontenacarchbiosphere.ca

10. Windmill Point Lighthouse

Lat: 44.720895
Long: -75.487130

Notes:

In the 1830s, after a period of rebellion in Upper Canada, it was popularly believed in the US that Canadians didn't wish to be ruled by Britain. In November 1838, a group of Hunter Patriots decided to invade Canada and restart the rebellion. They targeted the town of Prescott and Fort Wellington, but the plan was botched when the town was forewarned, and when the invaders' ships ran aground. They eventually regrouped at a stone windmill, downriver. The windmill was built of thick stone and stood 18 metres high on top of a 9 metre bluff. While not meant to be a part of the invasion, it was an ideal fortification. With its height, it was a good observation point, and its thick stone walls would repel small arms and small artillery. On the morning of 13 November, a small force of British infantry from the 83rd Regiment and approximately 600 Canadian militiamen attacked the Hunter position. The attack failed, leaving 13 regulars and militiamen killed and 70 wounded. 18 Hunters were also killed along with many wounded. With the arrival of British regulars and heavy artillery from Kingston, the windmill fell on November 16. Royal Navy gunboats and steamers blocked the Hunters from escaping and with casualties mounting, the would-be surrendered.

Driving directions: From Prescott, follow County Rd. 2 east about 2km to Windmill Point Rd.; turn right, about 200 metres to Lighthouse National Historic Site.

5. Jones Falls

Lat: 44.544868
Long: -76.235741

Notes:

Jones Falls is a major lock station on the Rideau Canal, the fourth flight above Kingston. The high drop of water from lake above to stream below called for three locks in total, and what was in the day the greatest dam project on Earth. Atop a hill at the lock station, with a commanding view of the landscape is a lockmaster's house – but one that was a small fortress. Heavy shutters could seal the windows, and there were wedge-shaped slits in the walls from which one could shoot outwards, but would make it all but impossible to be shot from outside. Despite cross-border tensions of the years following the War of 1812–1814, attacks never came.

Driving Directions: Take King St west, back to Prescott. Turn right onto Edward St. Drive north about 2km, and turn right onto Highway 401 Westbound on-ramp. Drive 20km to County Rd 29. Turn right and drive north on County Rd 29 for 13.5km. Turn left onto County Rd 42 W, drive for 21km. Turn left onto County Rd 33, drive for 8km to Old Briar Hill Rd, turn right. Continue on Briar Hill Rd and Fortune Line Rd to County Rd 15. Turn right, and travel north for 500m. Turn left onto Jones Falls Rd. After 3km, turn left onto Kenney's Rd for Jones Falls Lockstation and Hotel Kenney.

6. Hotel Kenney

Tel:613-359-5500

Address:
59 Kenney Road, Elgin

Website:
www.hotelkenney.com

The Hotel Kenney is a well known and well loved hotel that has served summer visitors since 1877, when the first hotel was built. Following a fire, the current hotel was constructed in 1888, and remained in the same family for several generations. A great place for lunch, dinner – and good old-fashioned relaxing, at Jones Falls Locks, and part of the Jones Falls story.
Open May - October

Notes:

4. Kingston Mills

Lat: 44.292596
Long: -76.443690

Kingston Mills is the first flight of locks on the Rideau Canal, inland from Kingston. While a sublimely serene scene and experience today, the canal was actually an engineering response to circumvent potential US military threats along the vulnerable transportation route of the St. Lawrence River. The canal was hewn along the course of rivers and lakes, wetlands and waterfalls, and through rock ridges and points of land, to reach the Ottawa River, where shipping could then travel between Kingston and Montreal well in (then) British territory. In the late 1820s construction period, only the old Fort Henry existed to guard the canal entrance, and so a Blockhouse was built at Kingston Mills for its defense. Exhibits at the lock station tell the story.

Driving directions: From Jones Falls, take Jones Falls Rd back to Highway 15, turn right. Drive south for about 35km, turn left on Kingston Mills Rd.; 2.2 km to Kingston Mills Locks

Notes:

Return to Green Woods Inn

Lat: 44.275687
Long: -76.445420

Driving directions: Return to Highway 15, turn right to continue south. Drive about 3km back to Green Woods Inn. 1368 Highway 15, Kingston.