



run the niagara escarpment

by **Simon Donato**

Last June twenty Adventure Science athletes (see sidebar) embarked on a non-stop traverse of the Niagara Escarpment and Bruce Trail from Tobermory to Queenston Heights. They called their adventure Blaze – The Niagara Escarpment Race. Over nearly four days the athletes, divided into two competing teams, traveled non-stop day and night en-route to finishing the journey in a record 3 days, 23 hours and 10 minutes. On the last stage of the race the teams were within 15 minutes of one another, and, in the spirit of all that the outdoors is about, decided to finish together as a single team. Seventeen of the original 20 made the finish line.

Over four days the Adventure Science athletes picked and recorded their favourite sections of the journey. Here they share them with us!

1 Tobermory to Cypress Lake

Distance: 19 km

Estimated time to complete: 2hrs. 15 min. – 5hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 5/5

Stunning scenery and abundant wildlife make this trail section a must for runners who want solitude. Running from the quaint fishing harbour of Tobermory to the post-card worthy scenery on the Georgian Bay side of Cypress Lake, the route follows mostly trail and travels through dense forest, open field, across boulder beaches and sheer cliffs, providing incredible views of the bay and wildlife (including the rare Massasauga rattlesnake). Exposed roots, fractured rock and boulder fields make this trail very technical and challenging, but extremely rewarding.

2 Rush Cove to Hope Bay

Distance: 14 km

Estimated time to complete: 1 hr. 15 min. – 3 hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 3.5/5

Near Lion's Head, this trail section skirts along the escarpment edge into the picturesque village of

Hope Bay. This section is well marked and provides some excellent running terrain. Dominated by sweet, flowy single track, this trail section provides great views of the bay from the cliff edge, as well as some excellent open forest running, and cool navigation through large boulders and through rock crevasses that are prominent in this area. A word of caution though: the trail "pops" out along the escarpment edge without warning at several points, so attention while travelling along this section is a must!

3 Beaver Valley: Epping Lookout to Campbell's Hill

Distance: 40 km

Estimated time to complete: 4 – 10 hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 3.5/5

This trail section follows the escarpment through the Beaver Valley area and provides runners with incredible views across the valley, beautiful hardwood forest running, and challenging hill climbs. The trail is not as technical as other sections, but the elevation gain and loss will definitely keep the thighs burning. While the trail can be extended or shortened from what is suggested here, it is all so great through this area that it would make for an epic run on a beautiful fall day!

4 Blue Mountain

Distance: 10 – 20 km

Estimated time to complete: variable, approx. 4 hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 3/5

The trails along the top of Blue Mountain take you across the highest point of the Niagara Escarpment and reward you with impressive views of Georgian Bay and the surrounding area. The trail is mostly sand and clay, with roots and tree stumps being the primary obstacle to worry about. Rocks are generally uncommon through here. For extra fun, run from the base of Blue Mountain resort up one of the trails to connect with the main trail along the crest.

Along the crest the trail undulates and travels along fields and through mature hardwood forests. Bring your camera!

5 Mono Centre to Airport Road

Distance: 25 km

Estimated time to complete: 2.5 – 5 hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 2.5/5

A beautiful section of trail for fit runners who love to climb, and don't want to drive to Collingwood. The rolling terrain provides the athlete with the challenge of numerous hill climbs through mature hardwood forests, as well as fun twisty descents, river crossings, and great straightaways you can hammer. The trails are well marked and well maintained through Mono Centre and Hockley Valley. This section features a "bonus" of several kilometres of hilly new single track trails near Airport Road. These new trails are not featured in the most recent Bruce Trail guidebook, so go on the Bruce Trail Conservancy site first to check out the trail updates.

honourable mention:

6 Hamilton: Sydenham Road to Chedoke Golf Club

Distance: 24 km

Estimated time to complete: 2.5 – 5 hrs.

Technical Difficulty: 3/5

This section of trail only gets an honourable mention because the main trail has been re-routed through the streets of Dundas. Despite the loss of the Dundas Peak and Webster's Fall sections, the route travels through Dundas Valley, which is a true gem located virtually in the heart of Hamilton. Runners will travel through hardwood forests, fields, and pass waterfalls along this route, while they deal with lots of elevation gain and rocks, roots, and open sandy trail. Considering that over 500,000 people live within a 30 minute drive, this trail section deserves recognition!

Adventure Science, founded by Canadian endurance athlete Dr. Simon Donato, was created to promote exploration, science, and fitness, and accomplishes this through combining challenging endurance projects with a scientific and social focus.

Adventure science brings athletes and scientists together to explore the world in a scientific way.

On this journey, the athletes raised money and awareness for two charities, Muscular Dystrophy Canada and the United Mitochondrial Disease

Foundation. The athletes also participated in a physiology study led by Dr. Mark Tarnopolsky of McMaster University, with the goal to better understand muscle damage in ultra-endurance stage races. Visit www.adventurescience.ca for more details.