

Tour the Grand River in Grand Style

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The Grand River watershed includes all the land drained by the Grand River and its tributaries. At 6,800 square kilometres (2,800 square miles), it's the largest watershed in southern Ontario. It's home to close to one million people and includes the cities of Brantford, Cambridge, Guelph, Kitchener and Waterloo, as well as many small towns and villages. Because it flows South to Lake Erie instead of into the nearest Great Lakes such as Huron or Georgian Bay, it makes other rivers seem small. From start to finish, it drops 1200 ft., has ninety species of fish and ends at Port Maitland; it has four major river tributaries flowing into it, including Conestogo, Nith, Speed and Eramosa. The name is fitting as it is so grand.

Elora Gorge Park offers many ways to explore the water. You can rent a tube to float down the Grand and through the gorge. But with so much history surrounding the Grand River, it seemed fitting to punt in a traditional style punt on the calm waters of the Elora Mill dam, part of the Grand in Elora, Ontario. Architect designed, the punt seats eight passengers; ergonomic seats

made the tour more comfortable than sitting on the floor as one does in a traditional style punt. The canopy turns into a sail giving flexibility to the beautiful wooden punt, the only one of its kind in Canada.

We chose to take the historical tour even though we were tempted by a musical serenade. Highlighting much of local history and archeology, Elora locals are wowed by what they discover about their beautiful village. Ken Thompson, owner and builder of the punt, poled us down the river, making it clear that he loves what he does and is very proud of his hometown. After enjoying punt boats during a stint in Europe, he returned to Elora and built the traditional punt boat by hand. Employee Adam shared the details of the area, regaling us with local history as well as archeological tidbits. We pulled over to the side of the limestone cliffs to identify fossils including clams, oysters and mollusks, clearly imprinted into the rocks lining parts of the river bank.



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We crossed the river to see fossils, turkey vultures, Georgian bred swans, Canada geese, floating gently past tiny islands in the shallow channel. A delightful way to pass a beautiful fall afternoon, I felt as though I should be holding a parasol, wearing a large hat and a Victorian dress. Next time perhaps.

Choose from a piloted safari, a custom cruise with either a storyteller, a historian, a musician or special entertainment. Or you can do it all and captain your own vessel with a bare boat hire.

Next year I am looking forward to the guided "Maid of the Falls" boat tour which takes you from the Cove (opposite Lover's Leap in the Elora Gorge) to the base of the iconic Tooth of Time Waterfalls (next to the Elora Mill). They will be using a blue-water mahogany lapstrake dory that will be rowed by a pilot-guide who will regale up to six passengers about the Attawanderon "Maid" who jumped to her death from Lover's Leap.

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