

Explore Watkins Glen on the Gorge Trail

You can experience the dramatic landscape of Watkins Glen on the **Indian Trail**, **South Rim Trail** and the **Gorge Trail**. The Indian and South Rim Trails follow the forested rims of the gorge. Watkins Glen is best experienced on the **Gorge Trail**, which follows Glen Creek past water-sculpted rock and 19 waterfalls. The **Gorge Trail** can be accessed from the Main, South and Upper entrances. Most visitors walk uphill from the Main Entrance and return. Others take a shuttle bus (when available) to the Upper Entrance and walk the 1 ½ miles back down to the Main. Many prefer a shortened trip from the South Entrance to the Main or vice versa. If you would like to explore the gorge with a guide, look for posters around the park listing times for tours offered weekly during the summer months.

As you walk the Gorge Trail, the text below will help you explore the landmarks labeled on the map. Look for interpretive panels along the way that will reveal more about what you see and hear around you.

Entrance Tunnel - Tunnels in the gorge were hand-cut into the rock in the early 1900's. As you emerge from the tunnel onto **Sentry Bridge**, peer through the hole cut in the rock on your right. In the mid 1800's, water behind a dam passed through this tunnel, down a wooden trough, and over the waterwheel of a flour mill in the Main Entrance. Visit the interpretive panel near the Entrance Tunnel for more information about the mill.

Cavern Cascade - This is one of two waterfalls you can walk behind. This is made possible by the wearing away of a thin layer of shale rock underneath a tougher layer of sandstone. Can you find the layer of shale and follow it along the gorge wall? This waterfall has eroded this narrow section of gorge and the deep pools below. Cavern Cascade and other waterfalls have created Watkins Glen by eroding the rocks deep into the hillside.

Spiral Tunnel and Suspension Bridge - After emerging from **Spiral Tunnel**, you will pass Cliff Path on your right. This leads to Point Lookout on Lover's Lane, then on to the **Suspension Bridge**. There, you can access the Lily Pond, South Pavilion and swimming pool, or you can pick up the Indian Trail. If you continue on the Gorge Trail, you will walk under the **Suspension Bridge** which is 85 feet above the creek. During the great flood of 1935, the water rose to within five feet of it! Much of the stone masonry work in the park was built after this flood.

In the 1800's, the dining room of the 3-story Glen Mountain House peered over the gorge next to the Suspension Bridge and Lily Pond. Today you will find interpretive panels there that portray the character of this resort hotel.

The Narrows - Beyond the next tunnel and staircase are the **Narrows**. The gorge here has its own "micro-climate." It is shady, cool and very moist most of the time, similar to a rainforest. Plants including ferns and mosses prefer these conditions and thrive here.

Glen Cathedral - Beyond the top of the next staircase is the broad, high **Glen Cathedral** area. Lover's Lane meets the Gorge Trail here which leads to the Indian Trail at the Suspension Bridge. If the Narrows are like a rainforest, then the Cathedral is like a desert. On a clear day, you will notice the sun soaking the dry gorge walls beside the trail. These ledges support drought-resistant grasses, wildflowers and shrubs typical of a dry field. An interpretive panel here features the plants that grow in both sunny and shady sections of the gorge.

Just where Lover's Lane joins the Gorge Trail here, there is a slab of stone with a rippled surface. Stand on it. You are standing on an ancient sea bottom! They were once ripples of sand on the floor on an ancient sea that eventually turned to stone. To learn more about the formation of the gorge bedrock, stop at the next interpretive panel a few hundred feet from here.

Central Cascade and Glen of Pools - **Central Cascade**, plunging more than 60 feet, is the highest waterfall in the gorge. Above this waterfall, the trail crosses the creek on a scenic bridge where you will find a panel that highlights the **Glen of Pools** area. Stop here to discover how the creek forms deep and rounded "plunge pools" or "potholes."

Rainbow Falls - The Glen of Pools leads to Rainbow Falls. Like Cavern Cascade, you can walk under this waterfall. Visit Rainbow Falls in late afternoon to see rainbows reflected off the falls on a sunny day.

Spiral Gorge - Beyond the bridge above Rainbow Falls, enter a dark and narrow passage with dripping springs, sculptured pools, and thin Pluto Falls, named for the ancient Roman lord of the underworld. Little can grow in this darkness.

Mile Point Bridge - The Indian Trail and South Rim Trail intersect the Gorge Trail at this point. Here you can:

- Take the **Indian Trail** to reach the Upper Entrance or return to the Main Entrance via Lover's Lane and the Gorge Trail or return to the South Entrance via the Suspension Bridge.
- Continue on the **Gorge Trail** for ½ mile along a quiet section of the stream and up the 180 steps of "Jacob's Ladder" to reach the Upper Entrance.
- You can cross the bridge and access the Onondaga campground loop or the South Entrance via the **South Rim Trail**.

Trails are open from dawn to dusk. A shuttle bus between the Main and Upper Entrances is available during the summer season.

Enjoy exploring The Glen!

