

TAUGHANNOCK FALLS

Description: Taughannock Falls, a.k.a. The Big T. This isn't the tallest waterfall in New York State, but it is one of the most impressive. The waterfall drops 215 feet in one plunge. The surrounding cliffs tower an additional 200'+ higher.

Location: This waterfall is located in Taughannock Falls State Park, about 7 miles north of Ithaca, NY on the west side of Cayuga Lake.

Directions*: This park is very popular, and easy to locate. Follow State Route 89 north from Ithaca, NY, or south from Auburn, NY. There is ample parking, although the parking area for the trail into the gorge from the lake is fairly small. There is ample parking just across SR 89, however. The overview parking area can be easily reached by taking Taughannock Falls Road, which is the first left turn off SR 89 heading north from the main entrance.



Photography: There are several locations for photography. The trail from the lower parking area to the base of the waterfall, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile, is wide, well kept, and occasionally muddy in places. It parallels the stream bed and there are numerous small cascades along the way. Most impressive is the wide, but virtually rock free, stream bed which shows fossilized ripples in many places. The viewing area at the base of the waterfall is just visible at the lower right of the image above. When the flow is heavy, there can be a great deal of spray. Fortunately, there are many locations along the trail as you approach the falls which are dry, so all is not lost. You can also make some nice images from the wooden bridge as it crosses the stream. However, it shakes quite a bit when people walk on it, so time your shots according to foot traffic.

There is a superb viewing area perched on the north cliff edge which offers a very dramatic view of the falls. This overview is often crowded. I like to arrive early to have space to set up my tripod (and also to work with the morning light); directions above. On one visit, I was surprised to find a wedding in progress at the upper viewing area.

There is also an 'Upper Taughannock Falls', also known as Summit Falls, shown on the park map. It is not often mentioned in waterfall books. Continue west on the Taughannock Park Road when leaving the overview area, until you reach Jacksonville Road. (Less than a mile.) Turn left, and the upper parking area is just on your left. There is a large trail map posted there. You will hear the waterfall immediately. Follow the trail to the east. The trail soon passes under an old railroad trestle. Take the short stairway on the right to have a good look down on Summit Falls. (The railroad bed is now a hiking trail; no need to worry about on-coming trains!) Return to the trail and continue to some good views of the upper gorge.

* Use the accompanying KML file to generate your own driving directions in Google Earth!

Accessibility: Other than its $\frac{3}{4}$ mile length, the walking path to the base of the waterfall is an easy walk. It is wide and flat, and likely wheel chair accessible. There are some muddy spots along the way, but these are not an impediment. The trail is in fact a single lane road, and composed of course shale and pea gravel.

Note: This trail is closed in winter due to the potential for large blocks of ice to fall onto the trail. Water seeps from the gorge wall at many places; this will freeze against the gorge wall forming enormous blocks of ice. When the water freezes, it expands. This loosens rocks but locks them in place until spring. When the spring thaw arrives, large rocks may also fall across the trail.

There was a death here in 2006 due to such a rock fall, when the gorge was open. I have been at the overview area in winter and heard the sounds of these rock and ice falls; they are quite startling! If the trail is closed, simply stay out. If the trail is open, be careful!

Web: Park Home Page - <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/62/details.aspx>

Trail Map - <http://nysparks.state.ny.us/parks/attachments/TaughannockFallsParkMap.pdf>