



# a tour through space and time black creek watershed

Black Creek, known by the Seneca Indians as Checkanango Creek, begins in Middlebury, Wyoming County and is little wider than a drainage ditch before entering Genesee County Park. It flows north and east through Monroe County until it joins the Genesee River just north of the Ballantyne Bridge.

The Black Creek watershed has an approximate east-west dimension of 40 miles and an approximate north-south dimension of about 20 miles. The Black Creek drainage area is about 202 square miles and the main stream (stem) runs for over 46 miles.

Total relief in the Black Creek watershed is almost 700 feet; the creek heads at about 1200 feet above mean sea level (ASL) and reaches the confluence with the Genesee River at an elevation of 512 feet ASL. The Onondaga Escarpment, a regional bluff area trending east-west, crosses the watershed just south of Interstate 90 and bounds the Allegheny Plateaus to the south from the Lake Ontario Lowlands to the north.

Land use in the Black Creek watershed is predominantly rural-agricultural, but also includes residential, commercial, wetland and forest areas. The 2000 Census indicates that population in the Black Creek watershed is approximately 40,000.

*Natural history*  
The bedrock of the Black Creek watershed—composed of limestone, dolostone, shales with interbedded siltstone, rock salt and gypsum beds—originated from the compaction of sediments deposited approximately 400 million years ago, when this region was part of a continental sea. At this time the Appalachian Mountains were uplifting to the east, and the Michigan Basin to the northwest was subsiding. After the sediments turned to rock, there was a period of uplift, followed by a long period of erosion. And then came the Ice Age.

A fault zone—the Clarendon-Linden fault zone—crosses the western side of the Black Creek watershed. The fault zone makes a rather prominent topographic escarpment that can be viewed on the campus of Genesee Community College; the northerly flowing segment of Black Creek parallels the fault zone. This fault zone is moderately and sporadically active.

Most landscape features visible today result from glaciation that occurred 30,000 to 10,000 years ago. Ice advance scoured bedrock leaving resistant rock formations as high areas and less resistant bedrock as low areas. A thin blanket of glacial till was spread across most areas and elliptical drumlins pointing to

## caring for black creek and its tributaries

**DO**  
plant buffers of native trees and shrubs along streams  
maintain stream-bank protection structures, such as rock slopes and walls  
build steps or ramps for frequent stream access  
avoid using chemicals and fertilizers near storm drains or streams  
maintain your septic tank in good working condition  
toss pet droppings in toilet or with garbage sent to landfills  
wash your car on the lawn or at a car wash  
dispose of medicines, household chemicals, cleaning products, vehicle fluids, pesticides and insecticides safely and legally

**DO NOT**  
disturb stream beds or banks, dig, or remove gravel without a NYS permit  
remove vegetation along stream banks  
remove logs from a stream without a NYS DEC permit  
change stream courses  
drive along shorelines  
allow pets or grazing animals near stream edges  
dump garbage, debris or other contaminants into storm drains or streams  
dispose of waste oil in water or soil (call your County for advice)

**8** **Bergen Swamp** is approximately three miles long (east-west) and one to one-and-a-half miles wide. Black Creek flows along the north edge of the Bergen Swamp, a boggy area filled with water rich in calcium carbonate. A sensitive environment, known for its array of rare species of plants and animals, Bergen Swamp is on the Register of National Natural Landmarks and is part of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve.



**10** **Drew's Nature Center**, accessible only by hiking, is undeveloped, mainly wooded wetland, adjacent to property protected by Bergen Swamp Preservation Society. The park contains a five-acre shallow water area, formerly a marl-mining operation.



**11** **The Genesee County Park & Forest** contains the headwaters of Black Creek. Established in 1915 and recognized as the first county forest in New York State, the first woodlot was purchased in 1882 in order to supply wood to the county's Poor House for cooking and heating. The park includes over twelve miles of trails, five ponds, and a variety of wildlife, trees and plants. An interpretive nature center provides a site for a variety of nature programs and environmental education displays.

**7** **West Shore Railroad Trail**, formerly a branch of the New York Central line, extends approximately twelve miles through the Towns of Bergen and Byron in Genesee County and into the Village of Churchville and the Town of Riga in Monroe County, generally following the original alignment.

**5** **Trestle Park**, in the Town of Byron, features a trestle bridge over Black Creek. In addition to the creek, this mostly undeveloped park offers a four-acre pond for fishing, woods, open areas, wetlands and trails. Tent camping is available for a small fee; arrange through the Byron Town Clerk.



**22** **Pfrengele Property**, named for the family who donated the land to the Town of Chili, is a parcel of upland woods, open fields, swamp and marsh at the confluence of Mill Creek and Black Creek. Black Creek forms the northern boundary of this former farmland, purchased by a wealthy industrialist who had a cut-stone bridge built over Mill Creek; this structure can be viewed by looking west from the Scottsville-Chili Road bridge over Black Creek. Mill Creek powered the mills in the Hamlet of Clifton in southwest Chili.

**13** **Churchville Park** is full of recreational features. Black Creek adjoins many of the lodges and shelters. Pinetree Lodge includes a view of a bay-like area of the creek.

**26** **Brookdale Preserve**, often flooded in spring, is comprised of forest and wetlands near the confluence of Black Creek and the Genesee River. Protected by the Genesee Land Trust, the preserve includes a number of ecological communities in succession: marshlands, shrub swamp, shrub land, sedge meadow, old field, floodplain forest, Northern hardwoods. The preserve is home to a variety of terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and is adjacent to the Genesee Valley Greenway.



**16** **Chili Mills Conservation Area** and Stuart Road Bridge sit at the western boundary of the Town of Chili. Both are listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places by the U.S. Department of the Interior. Illustrative of the relationships and scale of an early nineteenth-century rural family milling enterprise are the houses, mill, dam, bridge and archeological sites grouped around remnants of a 25-acre mill pond. Flour milling was a significant industry in Monroe County and western New York State.



**16** **The Stuart Road Bridge** was restored by Monroe County in 2002; it spans Black Creek along the original roadway from Chili to Buffalo and now adjoins the northwest corner of Black Creek Park on the south. The bridge provides a scenic overlook, but please be respectful of the private residences on either side of the bridge.

**17** **Black Creek Park** contains many undeveloped acres, ecologically diverse, with a hardwood swamp, cedar bog and cattail marsh. There are several unique trails, each providing opportunities to view plants and animals. The designated sledding hill is located behind the Woodside Lodge.



**25** **Reed Road Bird Refuge** was acquired by Bird Refuges Inc., in 1949 and transferred to the Genesee Land Trust for permanent protection in 2002. The nature preserve's mature woodland is a favorite of birders as it provides excellent migratory and nesting bird habitat. Due to the extremely wet nature of the property, there are currently no public trails.



**28** **Genesee Valley Greenway—Old Canal Lock #2**  
The Genesee Valley Greenway sits on the former Genesee Valley Canal, constructed in the first half of the 19th century to connect the Southern Tier to the Erie Canal. This canal provided a water route to avoid the Genesee River rapids that prevented river traffic into the City of Rochester. Later this canal became the site of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It passes through scenic woodlands, wetlands, river and stream valleys, rolling farmlands, steep gorges and historic villages. Of the 100 locks along the old canal, the lock found in the Black Creek watershed is one of the most ornate and best preserved.



**29** **Genesee Valley Greenway—Double-arched Culvert**  
Near its confluence with the Genesee River, Black Creek runs beneath a double-arched stone culvert which supported the Genesee Valley Canal; later, the Pennsylvania Railroad; and today, the Genesee Valley Greenway trail. The double-arched stone culvert still in use was constructed across Black Creek ca. 1840 and is an example of our 19th century architectural heritage.

The Black Creek Watershed Coalition is a community-led group that grew out of a water quality initiative begun in the 1980s. To find out more about Black Creek watershed studies and grant-funded projects, ways to restore and protect Black Creek and its tributaries, and how to get involved in the Black Creek Watershed Coalition, visit [www.blackcreekwatershed.org](http://www.blackcreekwatershed.org), call (585) 753-2034, or e-mail [hel@monroecounty.gov](mailto:hel@monroecounty.gov).  
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