



Cycle to Aylmer and get a close up look at the Deschênes Rapids

The ride to Aylmer takes place on a good quality pathway and offers some very interesting views of the Ottawa River and the Deschênes Rapids.

From downtown Gatineau (Hull sector), it is a matter of getting on the Voyageurs Pathway and heading west. If you are coming from the Ontario side of the river, it is necessary to cross one of the downtown bridges or the Champlain Bridge in the west. The Champlain, Alexandra, and Portage Bridges all have bicycle laneways. Of these bridges, the Champlain Bridge offers the easiest way to connect to the Voyageurs Pathway.



The the Deschênes Rapids at the ruins of an old dam structure.

If you start this ride from downtown Gatineau (Hull), you can get on the Voyageurs Pathway opposite the intersection of Montcalm Street and Alexandre-Taché Boulevard. For the next couple of kilometres the pathway has quite a few twists and turns, and even a few small hills. It starts to straighten out and gets flatter once you

reach Moussette Park. This small park has a nice beach as well as a snack bar and other public facilities. However, since the pathway goes right through the middle of the park, you will have to pedal very slowly in order to navigate around the many people who make use of the place on hot summers days.

The pathway passes under the Champlain Bridge, meaning that there is no need to deal with the heavy traffic on the roads leading to and from the bridge. For cyclists coming across the Champlain Bridge, it should be pointed out that they might want to take a short detour onto Bate Island. When the Ottawa River is high and running fast (mainly in early spring), Bate Island is a real hotspot for whitewater (slalom) kayaking. If conditions are right, you often find a group of kayakers as they perform some impressive manoeuvres, including spins, flips, rolls, cartwheels, etc. You will have a front row seat because all this happens only a dozen metres from shore. It is well worth the stop.

Following the Voyageurs Pathway past the Champlain Bridge brings you into a wooded area for the next 4 to 5 kilometres. This wooded area separates the pathway from Lucerne Boulevard to the north, but it also blocks the view of the Ottawa River to the south. There are some side paths that allow you to get to the water's edge, but these are dead ends.

It should be noted that this section of the Voyageurs Pathway looks like it wasn't built that long ago. It has a good paved surface and is a little wider than many of the other paths in the National Capital Region. This last point, along

with the fact that roller-bladers, pedestrians, and cyclists tend to make an effort at accommodating each other's needs, means that there may be slightly less congestion on this path on busy weekend afternoons (but you can't always count on this).

The Deschênes Rapids

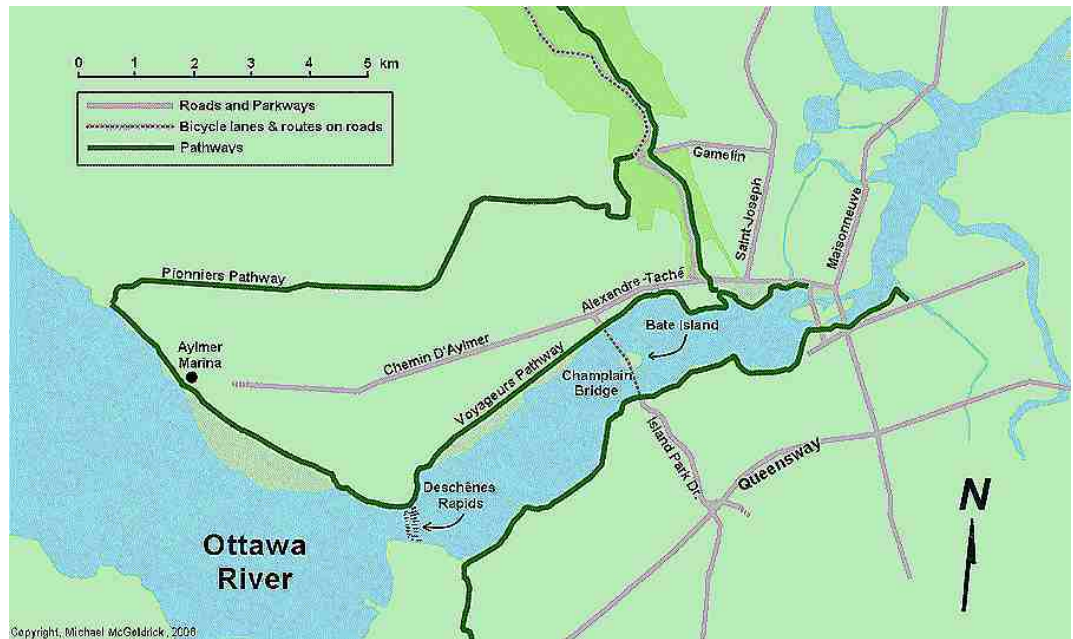
The next point of interest on the Vogageurs Pathway is the Deschênes Rapids.

They are hard to miss since the path hugs the shore of the Ottawa River in the area next to the rapids. There are several places to stop and check things out, one of these offers a great view of the ruins of an old dam structure that was built in the late 1800s to harness hydroelectric power from the rapids. If the water is high and running fast (typically in spring), it is truly an impressive sight to see the force of the Ottawa River as it runs through these ruins. It is worth noting that there were plans to rebuild this dam across part of the river as recently as ten years ago (plans to do so fell apart in the face of local opposition).

The river is quite narrow at the rapids, and you can see the Britannia Yacht Club on the opposite shore. The club's yacht basins trace their origins to excavation work of an abandoned project to build a canal around the rapids. If it is a nice day with good wind, this part of the Ottawa River just west of the rapids (also known as Lac Deschênes) will be teeming with sailboats from the four clubs which are located on this body of water.

Shortly after leaving the rapids, the

pathway comes to a fairly long wooden bridge which crosses over a basin which is wet and marshy during the spring, but usually dry in summer and fall. From here the path becomes less interesting as it moves into an urban setting and parallels Lucerne Boulevard. It will eventually bring you to the Aylmer Marina. In the immediate vicinity of the marina is a public beach and restaurant/bar which features a large terrasse. There is usually a fair amount of activity in this waterfront area, and it is only a couple of blocks



removed from Aylmer's downtown core.

The Aylmer Marina serves as a handy turn-around point for people out on a ride on the Vogageurs Pathway. However, the pathway continues west along the Ottawa River for close to two kilometres where it turns eastward and where it is known as the Pionniers Pathway. This part of the pathway is very straight and runs along Highway 148. There is nothing wrong with it except that it is somewhat boring. After a while you will come to a spot where the highway and pathway line up perfectly with the Parliament Building's Peace Tower in the distance. You begin to notice things like this when there is nothing else to grab your attention.

The Pionniers Pathway will eventually bring you to the lower part of the Gatineau Park (the intersection of Gamelin Street and Gatineau

Parkway). From here there is a path which heads south that allows you to get back on the Vogageurs Pathway. Regardless if you return via the Pionniers Pathway or simply turn around at the marina, your ride to Aylmer is now complete. Total distance covered may not be all that much,

so you should have plenty of energy to go back home or explore other areas on your bike.

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