The Niagara Escarpment 2002

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DOOR COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL
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Like No Place on Earth

The Niagara Escarpment is a major land feature in Wisconsin affecting water quality, biodiversity, and influencing decisions about development. Fast facts —

- Wisconsin’s escarpment is the eastern edge of a 650-mile sickle-shaped cuesta that extends from south of Rochester, New York, across portions of southeast Canada, to southeastern Wisconsin, west of Lake Michigan.
- The rock of the escarpment is primarily dolostone or dolomitic limestone that formed 420 million years ago when shallow, salt-water seas covered this part of North America.
- It formed during the Silurian Age.
- This rock fractures horizontally and vertically and is topped by shallow soils. The area is susceptible to groundwater contamination.
- In Wisconsin, the cuesta dips down at about a 10 degree angle, generally towards the east. In Door County, the cuesta dips an average of 3 degrees.
- A cedar tree growing at Sven’s Bluff in Peninsula State Park was aged to be over 500 years old.
- The Neda Mine State Natural Area at the southern end of the Escarpment is a major bat hibernaculum.
- Shaded cliffs and talus slopes along the escarpment remain cool throughout the summer, providing habitat for 16 rare terrestrial snails.
- Bublet, fragile, and marginal wood fern are common.
- Petroglyphs and other signs of earlier cultures are found along the escarpment.
- The escarpment in Wisconsin is a critical migration corridor for birds.
- Wisconsin’s escarpment includes over 150 endangered resource sites.

RESOURCES

www.escarpment.org
www.interlog.com
www.uwgb.edu/dutchs/geolwisc/niaages.htm
www.bruetrail.org/history

During Wisconsin’s YEAR OF THE TRAILS, be mindful that your activities may harm delicate escarpment communities. Stay off the escarpment, land that parallels the top of the ledge, and the talus slope. Know that your shoes or vehicle tires can bring unwanted seeds from plants to the escarpment. Invasive plants, like garlic mustard, can forever diminish the integrity of escarpment communities.

Cuesta ... Escarpment – What’s the Difference?

A cuesta is a ridge with a steep face on one side and a gentle slope on the other.

An escarpment is the edge of the cuesta.

The western edge of the cuesta, that is, the Niagara Escarpment, is in Wisconsin. It is exposed in Door County, along the eastern edge of Lake Winnebago, and in more limited sites in northern Illinois and eastern Iowa.

Though you may hear people refer to the entire rock formation as the “Niagara Escarpment” technically speaking the escarpment is just the edge.
The Niagara Escarpment Inventory Findings 1999-2001 and Considerations for Management by the Natural Heritage Inventory Program, Bureau of Endangered Resources

The study documented 241 occurrences of rare species and natural communities. A few rare plants follow:

Dwarf Lake Iris (Iris lacustris)
Small White Lady's-slipper (Cypripedium candidum)
Snow Trillium (Trillium nivale)
Low Calamint (Calamintha arkansana)
Spoon-leaf Moonwort (Butrychium spathulatum)
Small-flowered Grass-of-Parnassus (Parnassia parviflora)
Rock-whitlow Grass (Draba arabisans)
Lanceolate Whitlow-crest (Draba lanceolata)

A father and son explore the “sea caves” of the Niagara Escarpment, Eagle Trail, Peninsula State Park.

Diagram of Niagara Escarpment

*Source:* Niagara Escarpment Commission, 1999