

MIDLAND-PENETANGUIHENE

FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

HISTORY OF THE CLUB

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&

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THE MIDLAND-PENETANGUISHENE FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB FORMATIVE YEARS

The Midland-Penetanguishene Field Naturalists' Club's (MPFNC) first meetings were held in 1961 with several interested founding members from the area. Principal among these were two teachers from Midland Secondary School. Ed Cable was Head of Commercial and then Geography and Warren Jacklin was Head of Science. The FON was represented by Marshal Bartman.

For several years the Club met in the YMCA building in downtown Midland. This was the beginning of a long standing group of naturalists who would be instrumental in the formation of the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre. The first years were tenuous and the Club folded for a couple of years but was re-established by Warren Jacklin. About 1963-'64 Warren wrote a brief to Bill Cranston who had been the Publisher of the Free Press and a well known entrepreneur. He asked him for help with attracting a Canadian Wildlife Service (CWS) interpretation program to Midland and so the MPFNC had its first major project underway. They did not know how significant was to be their foresight.

The CWS had established a 'Plan to Appreciate Canada' by proposing the establishment of an ecology interpretation centre in each of the biotic regions of the country. Their aim was to establish programmes close to well traveled routes or near urban centres. Knowing about "The Plan...", Bill Cranston and Warren Jacklin subsequently met with Dr. Dave Munroe, Director of the CWS to persuade him to construct the first in this chain of centres at the Wye Marsh. The timing was perfect as the MPFNC needed a project and the CWS needed a local group. Bill Cranston had been instrumental in developing the reconstruction of the historic mission at Ste. Marie among the Hurons, which along with the Martyrs' Shrine gave the Wye Valley a triumvirate of tourist attractions for history, religion and nature.

The Club worked on this venture for several of its formative years and in 1969 the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre opened and became their headquarters. The official opening was held in 1969 officiated by a young Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Hon. Jean Chretien. The same year the wildlife centre assisted by the MPFNC hosted an international symposium on nature interpretation with the theme of 'More Effective Communication'. The centre had been built under the direction of Yorke Edwards who had pioneered the well known interpretation programmes in the Provincial Parks of B.C. He had already hired Bill Barkley as the first Biologist-in-Charge of the Centre who would also become active in the MPFNC serving as President for a term. It was Bill Barkley who in 1969 hired an infectiously enthusiastic and well known naturalist named Fran Westman. Fran is an Honourary Life member of the club and has served as a mentor for many field naturalist members and staff at the Wye Marsh since its beginning.

The MPFNC along with students from MSS constructed some of the first trails and displays at the centre. The club later became involved with erecting osprey platforms in the marsh and with many natural history inventories. They were not the only local group

to be involved with the wildlife centre's early days. The Midland Camera Club also took up residence at the centre meeting on Mondays while the Naturalists' Club claimed ownership of the third Thursday of the month which is still 'their night'.

The third Thursday tradition has hosted a wealth of natural history speakers and events in a tradition which has educated and informed the area's residents. Together with the Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre the MPFNC represent the public's growing concern with conserving wetlands, interpreting them to the public for more than thirty years.

Bob Whittam Jan. 2001

HISTORY OF THE MIDLAND PENETANG FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

1. 1961: FON sent up Marshall Bartman to organize the beginning of the club in the auditorium of MSS. Warren Jacklin: President Ed. Cable: Sec/treas. We had about a dozen members, meeting once a month in the old YMCA. We held together for over two years until interest waned and I canceled further meetings. The club wasn't canceled - just in limbo, until a more opportune time.
2. In the summer of 1966, I met Bill Cranston at a meeting at Ste. Marie and presented the idea of Natural History (a Nature Centre) to supplement and enhance the historical development of Ste. Marie. He said, "Write a brief". To write this brief, I took it upon myself to a) use the name of the Club to give greater credibility and b) write the nature section. Ed Cable wrote the geology section.
3. The following December 26, 1966, Bill Cranston invited me to his house to meet Dr. Munro, Director of the federal Department of Northern Development and Indian Affairs. I presented the ideas of the brief and about twenty slides of the Wye Marsh area. That department had about one million dollars to use by April 1, 1967 and so the plan started to create the Wye Marsh Nature Centre, the first of its kind in Canada. As biologists came to catalogue the natural potential of the Wye valley, and the building became a reality, I saw the opportunity to re-activate the Naturalist's Club.
4. In Sept. 1967, I started the club again, knowing, that in a short time, we would have our own auditorium and the expertise and credibility to realize the aims of the Brief. Once again, I was president and Ed Cable was Sec/Treas. Fran Westman gave her usual support and enthusiasm to help to re-start the club. Bill Barkley came as the first Biologist-in-charge of the Nature Centre in July, 1968. I drove Bill to view the foundation, full of water and damaged by the previous winter's frost. Everyone, including the new contractors, worked overtime to be ready for the official opening in 1970.
5. The club and its members were responsible for two important accomplishments in the seventies.
 - a) we sent briefs to save Giant's Tomb from the developers and to have the adjacent mainland included to form Awenda Park. I was chairman of this project and worked with Bob Whittam and Bill Barkley to effect its success.
 - b) When the federal government began its cutbacks, the club, with the help of Bob Whittam, formed The Friends of Wye Marsh.
6. What I consider most remarkable is that all of us saw and nurtured this wonderful synergistic relationship between the Naturalist's Club and the Wildlife Centre.

Warren Jacklin March/01

REPORT ON THE WYE VALLEY

THE MIDLAND PENETANG FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

We feel the opportunity to put North Simcoe on the map as an interesting and instructive place for students of Natural Science is now available

Areas of study: Anthropology, Biology, Geography, Geology.

Aims of promoting Natural Science in the Wye Valley:

1. Faced with the destruction of our natural resources, we can take the first necessary step on the road to restoration and protection of these resources. Only by being shown, can students realize the conditions and appreciate the role they can play in this restoration.
2. To train students to observe accurately, record precisely, interpret and evaluate their findings, from which they can gain an understanding of the problem under study.
3. The field exercise, while not new in education, has been difficult to promote and develop as a method of teaching. This has been to the detriment of education.

Outdoor nature is both a laboratory and a text book

The students need to learn how to conduct themselves in an outdoor laboratory as well as in an indoor one. They will learn how to study the way that geographers, geologists and biologists conduct themselves in field research.

Nature is also a textbook and contains all the knowledge that we have learned and can learn. The student must learn how to read this textbook. It provides reality, direct experience and the opportunity to do research. All our textbooks are inferior to this master copy. To study nature in all its aspects, along with formal education, should develop a student's ability to think, be adaptable and self reliant.

4. To promote an aesthetic appreciation of nature. This a difficult task because beauty is an intangible quality of nature. Beauty is a property of matter, as is colour, solubility, freezing point, etc. It cannot be measured, fitted into our gross national product or added to our personal income. Yet we know the loss of beauty diminishes our lives and its presence enriches us as individuals. Theodore Roosevelt, a great man and naturalist, said, "The lack of power to take joy in outdoor nature is as real a misfortune as the lack of power to take joy in books."

Ways to accomplish these Aims

1. Develop nature trails for the public as well as for the students. The more common trees, plant species and geological features could be marked and named. Guided tours could be arranged, as in Algonquin Park.
2. Set aside a special area which might be called a nature preserve, similar to the one set up on the west side of Lake Opeongo in Algonquin. There is one particular area consisting of beaver dams, spruce bogs, etc. which, while not as unique as some parts of the Bruce, contains a large share of orchids and other plant species. Unless this area is set aside for students of biology and for naturalists, it can be lost in a few short years. We have seen interesting plant species (e.g. fringed gentian) decimated on Beausoleil National Park in the past few years. There are areas of Showy Lady's - Slipper of over twenty square feet each. These would not last long if the general public were admitted.
3. Provide handbooks for the public containing a map of nature trails and a list of the various habitats with a check list of the flora and fauna associated with each habitat.
4. Provide a special handbook for students specially oriented on an experimental basis embodying the idea "How to use the area as a field exercise and how to write reports."
5. A canoe route might be considered as access to certain parts during specified times of the year. NO motor boats ever! The general idea should be to leave the area in it's natural state. Any trails made should be to cause the least disturbance in the area.
6. Diversified Reference Library
 - a) Set up displays and/or dioramas of various areas under study;
- anthropology, biology, geology, geography.
 - b) A plant herbarium of the flora of the area. This is a 'must' as a plant reference for students and visitors. This herbarium has already been started.
 - c) Check list of plants and birds.
 - d) Display of rocks, minerals and soils.
 - e) Text and reference library for various subjects. For example, as in the Cranbrook Institute in Michigan .
7. Some of the projects could utilize student participation. They could, under adult supervision, collect data and collect plant species for the herbarium. Our science students have used the area for this purpose, and as a field exercise. When young people participate, they are easily convinced of the need for preservation of our natural resources and identify themselves with the overall plan.

Representatives of Flora and Fauna

1. There are over one hundred nesting species of birds. About seventy five species have been studied, including their nesting habits, by students doing projects in natural science.
2. As well as a representative number of trees, shrubs, ferns, mosses and fungi, there are a number of interesting plant species. Listed below are some of the flora, to give an idea of the families represented and the types of habitat.

Common families present: Arum, Lily, Orchids, Purslane, Heath, Saxifrage, Ranunculaceae, Violet, Iris, Pink, Poppy, Fumitory, Sundew, Rose, Cruciferae, Legume, Milkwort, Primrose, Ginseng, Parsley, Milkweed, Gentian, Borage, Verbena, Nightshade, Composite, Figwort, Cat-tail, Honeysuckle.

- written by Warren Jacklin

THE GEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE WYE VALLEY

In few places do history and the natural sciences combine to provide such a convenient locale to observe these facets of our cultural and natural landscape.

The historic features of the valley have long been emphasized by the existence of the Shrine, and now, the reconstruction of Ste. Marie.

The valley that has cradled these activities has long been overlooked for its own worth. The geological history of the valley pre-dates the activities of even the earliest people, and on first hand examination, proves to be equally fascinating and intriguing to the observer.

Future visitors at Ste. Marie may find the evidence of Pleistocene glaciation and the profusion of native plants a refreshing diversion.

The north east - south west orientation of the valley, the low, smooth sided hills that range back from the mouth of the Wye River, the extensive width, all relate to the advance and retreat of the last great lake of the Continental Ice Sheet.

The valley gouged by the advance of the Wisconsin glacier contains a complex variety of crystalline and limestone rock deposits, from fine sands to massive erratics strewn along the sides of the valley.

With little imagination, the observer could visualize the former lake levels that once flooded the valley with the dammed-up melt-waters that created Lake Algonquin. The thick lacustrine deposits of sand, silt and clay form the basis of the marsh habitat.

Boulder pavement deposits and former sand beaches ring the valley on a series of terraces still clearly visible after the nine thousand years since their creation.

Not far from the Wye valley is found an abandoned rock quarry near the C.P.R. Medonte station at which may be found in abundance many distinct fossils of marine life that lived in the warm shallow seas that covered this area 450,000,000 years ago, during the Ordovician period of deposition.

The property is apparently now owned by the Dept. of Highways and would provide a most accessible recreation site for the growing numbers of rock hounds and fossil collectors in Ontario and adjacent states.

The Medonte quarry lies immediately to the south east of the projected highway to be extended from the termination of Hwy. 400 at Coldwater.

At Ste. Marie, it would be recommended that a display cabinet be constructed to contain dioramas and models of the region and the valley at the time of glacial activities with a corresponding scale dioramas and models of the valley in its present form.

- written by Ed Cable