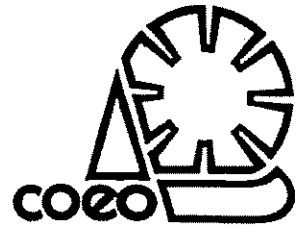


Pathways

THE ONTARIO JOURNAL OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Vol. 14 No. 1



VOICES FROM OUTSIDE OUR PROFESSION

Pathways

Our mailing address:

Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario
1185 Eglinton Avenue East
Toronto, ON M3C 3C6

Our Web site address:

webhome.idirect.com/~hesterkb/coeo

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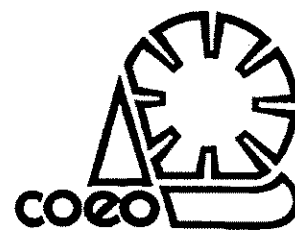
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Central Region:	Alice Casselman 3665 Flamewood Dr., Unit 44, Mississauga L4Y 3P5 (H) 905-275-7685 (F) 905-275-9420 e-mail: acercass@globalserve.net
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Far North:	Lori Briscoe 10-101 Pine St., Sudbury P3C 1W9 (H) 705-670-1422 (B) 705-673-5620 e-mail: briscol@scdsb.edu.on.ca
Northern Region:	vacant at this time

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Pathways Editorial Board

Co-Chair: Bob Henderson
 Dept. of Kinesiology,
 McMaster University, Hamilton L8S 4K1
 (B) 905-525-9140 ext. 23573 (F) 905-523-6011
 e-mail: bhender@mcmaster.ca

Co-Chair: Connie Russell
 Faculty of Education,
 Lakehead University
 955 Oliver Rd., Thunder Bay P7B 5E1
 (B) 807-343-8049 (F) 807-344-6807
 e-mail: constance.russell@lakeheadu.ca

M.J. Barrett
 Mono Cliffs Outdoor Education Centre
 755046, Second Line, Mono, RR #1,
 Orangeville L9W 2Y8
 (C) 905-460-5820 e-mail: mjb@yorku.ca

Adam Guzkowski
 33 Charleston Rd., Toronto M9B 4M8
 (H) 416-576-6039
 e-mail: hero@backpacker.com

Jillian Herfurth
 21-94 Beck St., Cambridge N3H 2Y2
 (H) 519-650-1183
 e-mail: jriviera32@rogers.com

Mike Morris
 Boyne River Natural Science School
 RR #4, Shelburne L0N 128
 (H) 519-925-9424 (B) 519-925-3913
 e-mail: mike.morris@ntel.tdsb.on.ca

Tom Potter
 School of Outdoor Recreation, Parks and
 Tourism, Lakehead University P7B 5E1
 (B) 807-343-8843 (F) 807-346-7836
 e-mail: tpotter@sky.lakeheadu.ca

Carolyn Finlayson
 707-124 Springfield Road, Ottawa K1M 2C8
 (H) 613-747-2682

Friends of Pathways
 Clare Magee, Barrie Martin, Barb
 McKean and Mark Whitcombe

Managing Editor: Rande Holmes
 402-173 Stephen Dr., Toronto M8Y 3N5
 (B) 416-207-8864 (F) 416-207-0467
 e-mail: rholmes@yorku.ca

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Pathways is published five times a year for the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO) and distributed to COEO members. Membership fees include a subscription to *Pathways*, as well as admittance to workshops, courses and conferences. A membership application form is included on the inside back cover of this issue of *Pathways*.

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The theme for this issue of *Pathways* is **Voices from Outside Our Profession: Why Outdoor Education Really Matters**. My intent as guest editor of this issue was to move beyond outdoor educators talking to outdoor educators. My goal was to hear from 'outsiders' who vividly recall experiences in outdoor education that they had as children and who then reflect upon why such experiences still have meaning and value. The result is this wonderful collection of first-time contributors to *Pathways* (in addition to three regular contributors). They live all over the country. They work in a variety of professions, both in the public and private sectors. And they all share a common passion for the natural environment, and for young people continuing to have teacher-led educational experiences in its many and varied settings.

More than one writer speaks of details forgotten, of hazy recollections of the school grade they were in, the names of teachers involved, and the operational details of the centre they visited. But, then, there are these crystal clear memories of long-ago moments in the outdoors: the weather, the time of day, the events that occurred and the feelings experienced are all recounted in great detail. The memories are varied: from hiking along a river bank, to a solo walk at night, to role-playing a rabbit in the Animal Instincts for Survival game. But the results are similar: compelling, formative and lasting memories of connection with oneself, with others, and with the surrounding natural environment. The power of experiential context is very apparent. The development of an empowering sense of place is no less evident.

The enclosed articles also make very clear the link between outdoor experience and education in, for and about the natural environment. This is a connection that we sometimes either forget or take too much for granted. To my way of thinking, it is incumbent upon all outdoor educators to also see

themselves as environmental educators. We must show students that our everyday activities very much impact upon the imperiled life support systems of this planet. And we must teach them that we can learn to live in sustainable ways.

Most of the articles in this issue recall experiences at outdoor education centres. While some of our writers show that outdoor education can occur in a variety of other settings, it is apparent that widespread exposure to the natural environment for today's urban children can only occur in appropriately staffed outdoor education facilities, with the support of our public schools and the governments that fund them.

This issue of *Pathways* is released at a time when what is left of publicly funded outdoor education programs in Ontario remains under severe threat of closure due to ongoing government cutbacks to education. This is in spite of clear warnings from the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario as well as others. And so, here is one more attempt to remind ourselves and those who make decisions on our behalf as to what really matters. In their quest for accountability, fiscal prudence and results, decision makers must give serious credence to the qualitative evidence that these narratives present. They are compelling testaments from the heart, and they demand our close attention.

I would like to thank the many individuals both within and beyond COEO who have provided this rookie editor with immeasurable help through their listening, suggesting, encouraging, networking, illustrating and writing. It's been an amazing process and experience. I hope that you find the results both informative and stimulating.

Grant Linney
Guest Editor

I was a fortunate child. My parents started me off in the outdoors at a very early age. I remember cool August nights as I lay on rock outcroppings in the Georgian Bay area. And I remember feeling the warmth of the stone from the sunshine of the preceding day. My father would share his knowledge of the stars with my circle of friends and me. We were inspired by what he saw and by the stories he would tell. They were filled with fact, and fiction, and a level of passion for the natural world that was contagious.

Many years later, when I was given the opportunity to teach in an outdoor setting, I was amazed at how well I remembered everything my father had shared with me — every detail, every story. And, as I recounted the tales of plants and animals to new ears, I realized the great joy of passing this wisdom on to the next generation. My father wanted me to understand and honour the natural

environment. He chose to do this through his stories and by providing many opportunities for me to experience the outdoors. I prize my memories of these times.

I am hopeful that the cycle continues, that my own children and the students I have taught will also remember and be motivated to share their passion when the time comes. And I am hopeful that our remaining outdoor education centres will continue to operate and provide what was once a natural part of growing up.

I know that reading this issue of *Pathways* will bring back fond and treasured memories of your own outdoor education experiences, and that these recollections will remind you that such opportunities are even more important for today's urban children.

Yours in the outdoors,
Mary Gyemi-Schulze
 COEO President

Board of Directors Meetings and Locations for 2001/2002

Date	Location	Time	Host	Focus
March 1, 2 and 3	Northern Edge	9:00 pm	Todd	Agenda/Retreat
Thursday, May 2	Conference Call	7:30 pm	Mary	Agenda
Thursday, September 12	Adventureworks	6:30 pm	Brian	Budget
Sunday, September 28	AGM	TBA		Agenda

Meetings will be potluck, unless otherwise stated. Please inform the host of your contribution ahead of time. Bring your own mug, planner and ideas.

Meetings are open to all members, so please encourage others to participate. It may be necessary on some occasions to hold a session "in camera" in the interest of privacy.

Grant Linney has taught outdoor and experiential education as well as environmental education with the Peel District School Board, the Ontario government (Bark Lake Leadership Centre), the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority, the Toronto District School Board, and Blyth and Company. After a seven-year absence from this field (due to funding cutbacks), he is now very happily employed as an Upper Canada College teacher at the Norval Outdoor School near Georgetown, Ontario. Grant can be reached at linney@castle.on.ca.

Much of the art for this issue is by Grade 9 Regional Arts students from Mayfield Secondary School (MSS) north of Brampton, including the cover art by Jaci Sawatsky. Mayfield is one of two Regional Arts high schools within the Peel District School Board. Other art has been provided by M+S Publishing. The centrespread illustration is done by Helena Hocevar, an outdoor enthusiast who is currently studying physiotherapy at the University of Toronto.

I AM RABBIT: Reflections on my First Outdoor Education Experience

by Sue Wallace

With heart thumping, eyes straining through the forest, I frantically seek shelter. Found! Only a few trees away, a brush pile. Safe from predators, for a moment at least. I rest. My heart quiets. I leave my hiding place, on the move again, exposed, darting from thicket to brush pile in search of food and water, sustenance I know I must have in order to survive. All the while on the look out for my mate, knowing that if I don't find him, my species might not survive. For a moment in time, amazingly, my teenage angst has faded away. I am no longer a 14-year-old Grade 8 Science student playing the Animal Instincts for Survival Game at the Wrigley's Corners Outdoor Education Centre in Waterloo County. I AM RABBIT.

A few years ago, a colleague asked me out of the blue if I could recall any childhood outdoor education experiences. I was amazed that my mind instantly rewound to this very scene when I found shelter in the brush piles. I was once again transformed from human to Rabbit as the memory of my first outdoor education experience played forward in my head. Until that moment, it had remained dormant in my mind for more than 20 years.

I remember how I felt. I remember what the woods looked like and how great they smelled because the earth was still damp from an earlier rain. I remember details about the ecology of the animal that I had been assigned. I learned about the importance of shelter, food and water to an animal's survival, and about ecosystems and food webs and how they work. I remember that I had fun.

Most importantly, I remember the profound effect of HUMAN when this creature was introduced in the latter stages of the game. After expending so much energy to survive all morning, I was dead in an instant . . . as soon as I was seen by HUMAN. In retrospect, this is one of the first experiences that I can attribute to putting me in touch with my own

environmental ethic. It was the time when the proverbial light went on, when I first understood that humans have a profound ability to alter their surroundings, to affect individuals and populations. I realized then that we have a responsibility to exercise that ability conscientiously and wisely. Each of us perceives the world through a unique filter, coloured in part by our personal knowledge and experiences. My first outdoor education experience certainly transformed the colour of mine forever.

In reflecting on why I remember this particular experience, my answer is simple: I learn best by "doing" — and by doing in context. My outdoor education experience was, like most, hands-on and experiential. It was real rather than abstract; it was within the context of the natural world around me. It makes good sense that, if we are going to teach about the natural world and its importance, we should do a large portion of this in the out-of-doors.

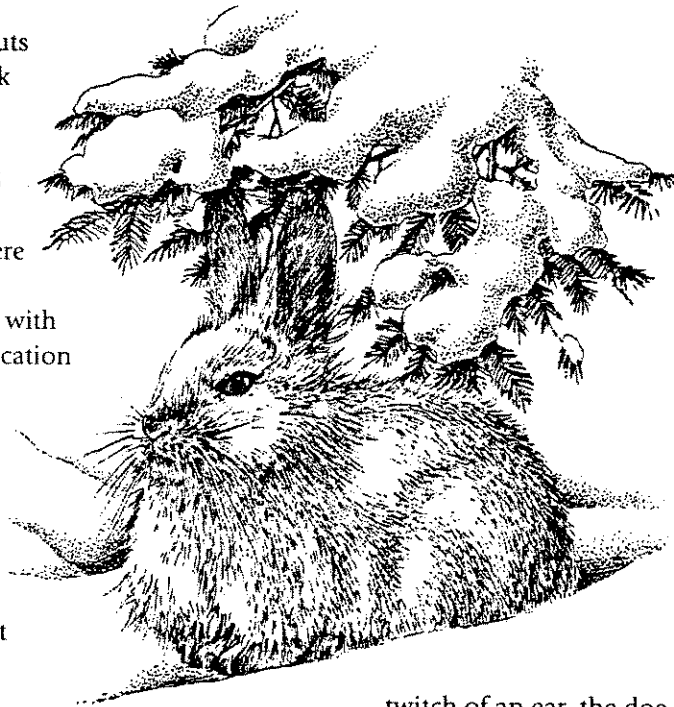
From the woods at Wrigley's Corners, I went on to seek other outdoor education opportunities. I was a Junior Forest Ranger. I studied wildlife biology at university and I spent every summer working at jobs in the outdoors — from tree planter to canoe ranger to outdoor educator. From there, I embarked on a career in marine biology and marine science education. Along the way, I spent most holidays getting back to nature, specifically back to Ontario's woods and lakes. When it came time to settle down, it was on 12 acres of southern Ontario's precious and vanishing woodlot.

My school field trip to Wrigley's Corners is not the only outdoor experience that shaped the path I chose. My parents took me camping when I was still in diapers. I grew up next to the country and my "childhood map" paints a picture of the cornfields I used to play in, the magnificent chestnut tree gracing Mr.

Schneider's farm from which I "stole" nuts and the maple trees we climbed out back along Maple Creek. I went to summer camp. In revisiting my childhood mementos box, I discovered my Grade 5 "Earth Scrapbook," filled with treasures about or from the natural world. But there are only a few moments in my life that I remember with clarity, with feeling, and with cognizance; my first formal outdoor education experience as RABBIT is one of them.

As I sit here reflecting, I can feel the presence of my one-year-old son. While my mind is eased by the fact that he will be able to explore the natural world around him on a daily basis — an ongoing and informal outdoor education — I am saddened to think that not all of our youth will have this opportunity. And so I am compelled to write, not only as an educator and an environmentalist, but also as a new parent. I share the Ontario Environmental Commissioner's concerns that "at a time when there is a critical need for the people of Ontario to understand complex environmental issues, environmental science and outdoor education programs are being cancelled throughout the school system" (2001). It will be everyone's loss if we do not engage our children in the out-of-doors in meaningful ways, especially if we are to become an eco-literate society and develop an ethic appropriate to the enhancement of environmental quality. One way to ensure that this happens is to provide outdoor education experiences for all students.

I will leave you with another story. I was fortunate to teach outdoor and environmental education for a few years. My most profound memory of that time was during a five-day backpacking trip in Killarney Provincial Park with students enrolled in the Bronte Creek Project (Halton District School Board). I witnessed an encounter between a foraging deer and one of my students who was returning to base camp after a solo reflection exercise. For several precious moments, time stilled as they gazed at each other, just a few metres apart, on a weathered mountaintop. And then, with a



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twitch of an ear, the doe calmly moved on her way. If today's decision makers could have seen the expression of absolute wonder and animation on this inner city kid's face, I have no doubt that outdoor and environmental education would not only be supported but also mandated in all Ontario schools.

Reference

Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. (2001, October 1). *Province must recognize limits to growth, says Environmental Commissioner*. [News release]. Retrieved December 15, 2001, from <http://www.eco.on.ca/english/newsrel/01oct01a.htm>

Sue Wallace is an Education Coordinator and Research Associate with the International Fund for Animal Welfare and the International Marine Mammal Association in Guelph, Ontario. She has academic training in wildlife biology and over a decade of experience in conservation biology research and environmental education. At work, Sue divides her time between developing marine education programs and researching conservation issues currently threatening wildlife and their habitats worldwide. At home, she spends most of her free time exploring the woods with her family.

Formative Moments along the Credit River

by Michael MacMillan

Norval is a hamlet about 45 minutes north and west of Toronto, near Georgetown. For most who pass through it, this settlement would provide little of note. It is simply one of many villages and towns increasingly encircled by the urban sprawl of the Greater Toronto Area in its inexorable expansion. For me, though, this area is filled with meaning and wonderful memories, because just beyond its northern boundaries lies the Norval Outdoor School, a 450-acre tract of Credit River valley and surrounding tablelands owned by Upper Canada College (UCC). As a student at UCC for seven years, I, like others, referred to this haven simply as “Norval.”

Norval was used in the late 1960s and early 1970s (as it still is today) as an outdoor education centre that encouraged boys to develop a better understanding of and excitement about our natural environment. Its programs included hard science as well as other activities that caused students to give pause and contemplate our use and misuse of the environment. These were the heady days of rising environmentalism: Pollution Probe, Greenpeace and other organizations were making their mark, and educators tried to find ways to stimulate this interest in their students.

Like most UCC students, I went on a number of day visits to Norval, as well as a couple of weeklong residential stays as a young teen. These field trips were an integral part of the school curriculum and thus mandatory. They were also big fun. I recall spending hours on “river walks,” trudging beside and through the river that traversed the length of the property, looking at a range of animal, insect and fish species, the names of which I have long forgotten, but the experience of which remains as if it happened just yesterday. More

hours were spent in the business of tracking, banding and recording information on various birds that populated or visited the area. All this was quite new to me. I was a city boy who never attended summer camp anywhere and, up to this time, I had had fairly limited exposure to this sort of thing. Staying up late in the bunks of Stephen House watching the stars, enjoying the fresh piercing air of a November morning as we set out on a hike before dawn, learning how to snowshoe — these are clear memories.

“Norval directly encouraged in me the development of two attributes that are sometimes difficult for a teenager to acquire sitting at a desk — a natural curiosity about the world around me combined with an appropriately healthy confidence that I could accomplish the goals that I set.”

Norval stayed with me. Long after the outdoor education component of our school curriculum was finished (Grade 9), I continued to visit Norval on my own steam and on my own time. By myself or with friends, I would visit Norval on weekends, not officially studying anything but casually enjoying the feeling, the setting, the birds, the river. Norval exerted a real pull.

I recall that, on Thanksgiving weekend in 1972, two friends and I decided to spend a couple of days camping at Norval beside the river. We assembled our camping gear and cooking utensils. We purchased some basic food supplies at the store in the village of Norval (mainly tins of baked beans as I recall, but we must have actually had more than that), and we set up camp. Apart from juvenile fun perpetrated by three teenage boys scaring themselves silly at the sound of every twig snapping or each animal movement during the night, the best part of that weekend was Thanksgiving "dinner." It was hardly a Martha Stewart special, but the fact that we had made the meal by ourselves, that nobody had instructed us to undertake this adventure — we just wanted to be there — made it delicious. I think it took us most of an afternoon to coordinate the building of the fire with the food preparations. We did have time, though, to have a good tramp up the river. It felt great. On the Monday afternoon, our Thanksgiving weekend effectively over, we trudged down the road into town, and waited for the intercity bus to take us back to Toronto and to a "proper" holiday dinner cooked by each of our mothers.

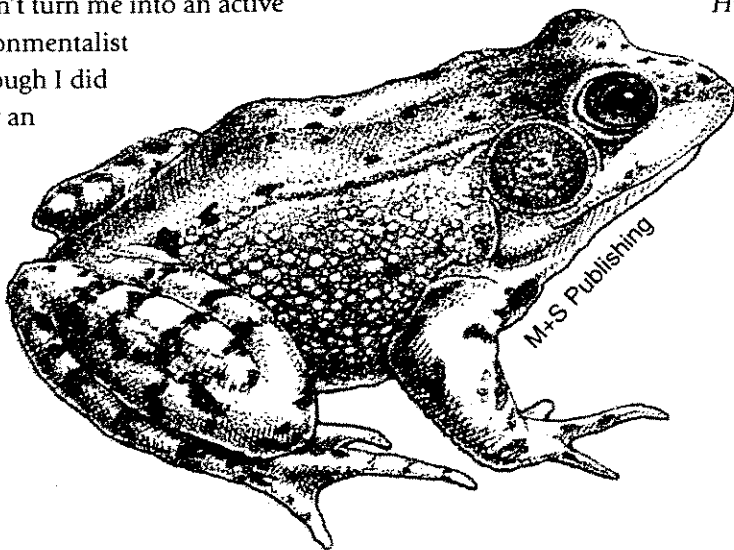
I know that Norval was important for me. It didn't turn me into an active environmentalist (although I did marry an

environmental lawyer). It didn't motivate me to pursue bird banding or taxidermy (another hobby of my youth). It didn't even inspire me to be a regular camper. However, Norval directly encouraged in me the development of two attributes that are sometimes difficult for a teenager to acquire sitting at a desk — a natural curiosity about the world around me combined with an appropriately healthy confidence that I could accomplish the goals that I set.

I realize now that what I most enjoyed about Norval was the sense of independence I experienced, of the opportunity to figure things out for myself. It gave me the impression that I ought to be able to be self-reliant, to explore, to make do without clear maps describing the route ahead. For me, this has been the true and lasting impact of Norval, and for that I do give thanks. And, my cooking has since improved.

Michael MacMillan co-founded Atlantis Films Ltd. in 1978, immediately after graduating from Film Studies at Queen's University. He is now Chairman and CEO of Alliance Atlantis Communications, a leading Canadian-based broadcaster, producer and distributor in the television and motion picture business.

His outdoor activities include cross-country skiing with his wife and running marathons.



Symbiosis

by Rob Bicevskis

The first wisps of smoke started to rise. Each curling trail left a pleasant cedar aroma in my nose. The rhythm of the bow was steady: back and forth, back and forth. The light brown powder was gradually filling the notch in the hearth. The smoke was now much denser, the cedar scent more intense. I had gotten this far many times before but, on this particular occasion, the spindle was truer and the top bearing was the result of a more clever choice of wood.

Now the smoke was so thick that the bottom of the spindle was often obscured from view. Occasionally, I could monitor that the powder was becoming a darker auburn. I increased the pressure on the upper wood bearing and pushed harder on the bow. The whirring of the spindle now grew burdened as the wood began to transform and the temperature rose. A last few strokes with all of my strength. Then silence, except for the pounding of my heart from the exertion of pushing and pulling the bow. I removed the spindle from the hearth and carefully blew on the pile of dark brown powder.

The moment of truth was here: will the smoke die out, or will it build? So many times before, I had watched the smoke trail away to leave a cold wood dust. I hoped this time would be different. Each breath was now answered by a greater quantity of smoke. I gently moved the hearth board from the thimble-sized pile of smoking powder. With my heart still pounding, another breath revealed a faint red glow. This was it. I had a coal! This was the tough part, but I was not done.

I gently rolled the tiny furnace into a nest of waiting tinder. Blowing on the tinder ball resulted in even larger quantities of smoke. The expanding red glow in the centre of the tinder soon became visible. Holding the tinder ball in my hands, I could feel the radiating heat. There was now a huge quantity of smoke and my

hands were almost burning, but I didn't care about scorched skin. I held on. A few more puffs of air and the whole tinder bundle burst into flames. I had made fire! This was truly a defining moment in my life. It was a major milestone in my study of the outdoors. It was also a homework assignment.

“Outdoor education provides context; it provides real experiences. As much as we want to isolate ourselves from the natural world, we are intimately tied to it.”

Homework? This certainly doesn't seem to be any conventional type of assignment. I was lucky. I attended Thornlea Secondary in Thornhill, Ontario. This school had two things going for it: an open mind to the unconventional and a great location. In the late 1970s when I attended Thornlea, the area was in transition from semi-rural to urban. A ten-minute walk took one from the chairs and desks of the indoor classroom to the outdoor milieu of a forested ravine. Due to the knowledge, energy and abilities of one teacher, André Bourbeau, Thornlea offered a series of courses called Outdoor Education. In addition, under André's direction, there was an active outing club.

We boiled eggs in birch-bark pots, in burdock leaves and in paper bags. Why didn't the birch-bark burn? Why didn't the paper bag burn? Now here was a place to apply lessons from physics class. We made soap by creating lye from wood ashes and boiling it together with rendered lard. How the heck did that

from ashes? Soap from fat? Chemistry suddenly had a new importance. Have you ever heard a student declare that trigonometry is killing them? Without a basic understanding of this subject, setting anchors for rock-climbing is literally a life-and-death situation.

And, besides learning about the outdoors through primitive skills, we gained a wiser and deeper appreciation of the natural ecosystems in which we live and that sustain us. Much of this was accomplished by simply spending significant amounts of time in these outdoor settings.

André, the teacher, and I, the student, both left Thornlea around the same time.

André went back to school to obtain a PhD in Outdoor Education, and he is now teaching that subject at the University of Chicoutimi. I went on to earn a BAsC in Engineering Science

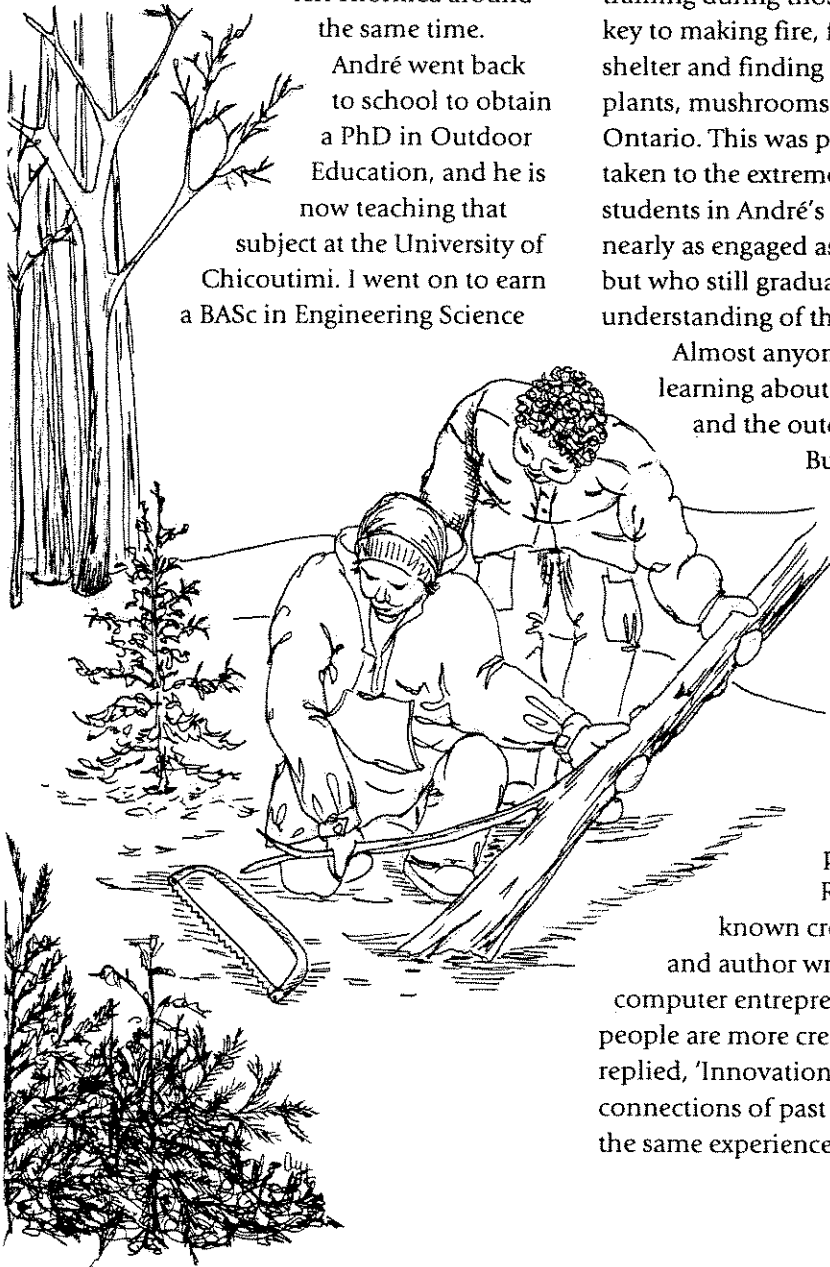
and an MASc in Electrical Engineering from the University of Toronto, and I am currently working as a Chief Technology Officer for Genesis Microchip, a highly successful technology company. While schooling took André and I in two different directions, both of us made sure that our education exposed us to lessons from "the other side."

André and I kept in touch and reunited on occasion to go out in the bush on survival trips. We went in all seasons and spent up to a week isolated from civilization with nothing more in our possession than the clothes on our backs. No matches, no knives, no food. All of the training during those high school years was the key to making fire, forming tools, erecting shelter and finding plenty of food among the plants, mushrooms and trees of Northern Ontario. This was probably outdoor education taken to the extreme! There were many other students in André's classes who did not become nearly as engaged as I did in outdoor pursuits, but who still graduated with a deeper understanding of the world around them.

Almost anyone can be convinced that learning about the natural environment and the outdoors is of some benefit.

But at what cost? Won't outdoor studies take precious time away from "the three R's"? It seems that in today's ultra-competitive society, children are being prepared for future success from the earliest of ages. Surely outdoor education can't be a productive use of time.

Roger von Oech, a well-known creativity teacher, advocate and author wrote, "I once asked computer entrepreneur Steve Jobs why some people are more creative than others. He replied, 'Innovation is usually the result of connections of past experience. But if you have the same experiences as everyone else, you're



unlikely to look in a different direction” (1998, p. 106).

Math and the hard sciences are necessary. They *can* be ends unto themselves, but more often, for a broad portion of society, they are tools. They are the *how*, not the *why*. Outdoor education provides context; it provides real experiences. As much as we want to isolate ourselves from the natural world, we are intimately tied to it. Water, food and air are but a few elements of our ecosystem. To blindly use and abuse these gifts is terribly myopic. This is where science can play an important role.

“With no opportunity to experience the outdoors first hand, environmental issues become distant and we end up causing great harm to our world”

Too often these days, people are making poor, sometimes emotionally based, decisions because they don’t have the tools to understand the issues before them. This applies not only to issues of the environment, but to many other areas of our existence. The key is to create the right balance between science and nature. As someone who went through an intense path of engineering and science studies, my outdoor pursuits and background did not disadvantage me in any way, but, rather, provided me with many direct and indirect advantages as well as much personal fulfillment.

One can intellectually argue for classical education vs. adding an element of the outdoors. Another angle to this dichotomy is to look inside us to see what *feels* right. Personally, there is something very deep within that drives me to find a balance between technology and nature. Canoeing the tidal flats of James Bay and being an active part of deep sub-micron microchip development are both

profoundly fulfilling experiences for me. I can only spend so long immersed in either domain before the other begins to call ever more loudly.

For now anyway, humankind is sharing this Earth and all of the gifts that it has to offer. We are still intimately connected to the environment and its health is directly coupled to our health. As species become extinct, land and air become too polluted to be usable, and even sunlight becomes hazardous due to a depleted ozone layer, there are many who stay on and continue this destructive path. In order to move forward, we need to raise awareness at all levels. We need to understand the *why* and the *how*.

Exposing today’s students to a balance of science and the outside world is critical. Too many kids are actually turned off by math and science because, for them, it doesn’t have context. They end up ignoring these subjects and, in later life, are unable to make educated decisions regarding a wide range of topics.

The same is true for outdoor education. With no opportunity to experience the outdoors first hand, environmental issues become distant and we end up causing great harm to our world, either by direct effort or indifference. Outdoor education has certainly had a big and positive influence on my life. I hope my thoughts will help to ensure the same opportunities for others.

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Rob Bicevskis is currently the Chief Technology Officer at Genesis Microchip, a large Canadian high-tech company that designs microchips for the display industry (e.g., flat panel LCD monitors, TVs, DVD players). He continues to be an all-season avid outdoorsman. His passions include wilderness and white water canoeing, kayaking, scuba diving, and telemark and cross-country skiing.

Cutbacks, Credibility, and the Macaroni and Cheese Experience

by Simon Beames

My first outdoor education experience was an “alternative learning week” near the Rivière Rouge in Québec. Who could have imagined that being huddled up under a tarp eating burnt macaroni and cheese in the pouring rain would become such an indelible memory? For five glorious days in May, my hormone-filled classmates and I traded quadratic equations, cell mitosis, and *The Merchant of Venice* for white water rafting, orienteering, and rock climbing. This was a good deal.

I remember my surprise when I saw the “beautiful people” in my class without shampoo, make-up, hair gel, and smart clothes. This lack of life’s necessities suited me and my gang of late-developers just fine, as we only washed a couple of times a week anyway. The best part of this grubbiness was that it levelled the playing field of coolness; for the first time, I found myself having communal laughs with different groups of kids than those with whom I normally associated.

Though I had been a student for nine years, learning wasn’t something I regarded as particularly useful. Out in the woods, it became necessary to master how to light a fire and set up a rainproof tarp. The lessons I learned that week have stayed with me because they were simple, timeless, and universal:

- You are accountable for your actions (or non-actions!): If you don’t stir the macaroni and cheese, you will spend an hour cleaning the pot.
- Treat the earth with respect: You can’t drink water from a stream you also use as a toilet.
- Life’s challenges are easier to face with friends: Be nice to the new kid with the strange accent and the pimples, as he may be one who belays you tomorrow.

Kurt Hahn said that young people learned lessons like these by being “impelled” into challenging outdoor experiences. But how can

we impel students into these powerful life-changing experiences if our government doesn’t support outdoor education? Assuming that most policy decisions are based on research, could it be that no one in the Ontario government has seen a report that will convince them to maintain, or even increase, the current amount of outdoor education programming?

As I review literature for my studies, I have found two recurring critiques of past research in outdoor education: First, traditional scientific methods are largely unsuited to the subjective personal experiences common in outdoor education. And second, low standards of investigation have yielded results that are untrustworthy and easily criticized. Perhaps we need to learn from other fields and dedicate a significant amount of time and money to high calibre research and development.

Most of us would rather spend the day actively learning with young people in the outdoors than conducting an academic inquiry. Still, if we aim to be recognized by the government as professionals offering worthwhile programs, we need to produce credible research findings that employ rigorous qualitative methods. This way, we will be better able to convince bureaucrats who make programming and budgetary decisions that outdoor education plays a vital role in developing responsible citizens for our planet — citizens who know enough to stir the macaroni and cheese.

Hailing from Montreal, but with exceptionally strong ties to Ontario, Simon has just begun a PhD in Adventure Education at University College Chichester in England. He spent much of the 1990s teaching Adventure Education in Hong Kong. This is Simon’s debut as a regular contributor to Pathways.

A Sense of Place

by Carolyn O'Neill

My Grade 6 class from Toronto's Brown Public School went to the Boyne River Natural Science School for a weeklong stay in the mid-1970s. This was certainly one of my first experiences away from home. Perhaps more importantly, it was also one of my first experiences "at home" in Ontario's great outdoors.

The most anticipated part of our trip was the much discussed and kind of scary sounding "night hike." As it turned out, it was a big adventure for us city kids. I remember my imagination taking hold in the certainty that there was a wolf paralleling us through the trees. But my lasting impression of this journey was being amazed at how well my eyes could adjust to actually see where we were going in the night, and how a nocturnal version of awe-inspiring beauty appeared to us under the stars.

"This was the only time during my formative years that the school system took me out to see and feel where I live, to experience the ecosystem of which I am a part."

On Friday, the last day we were to be at Boyne, my young mind was presented with an unexpected testament to the power of nature and to the reality that we must all come to respect it: the weather decreed that we must stay an extra night. It snowed, and it snowed, and it snowed, and I have this crystal clear image in my head of how, by Friday night, there was an infinite blanket of white covering everything outdoors, even the exterior of the large dining room windows through which we peered. It was not until Saturday morning that

we were able to trudge with all our gear along Boyne's access road to our buses waiting on the freshly ploughed and sanded town line.

I can't be certain of the long-term significance of this trip for me. I still remember the excitement of being away from home, the sometimes harsh physical sensations (e.g., cold feet), and the beautiful images of Ontario in winter — white, brown, grey, blue, shimmering. I suspect it is one of a string of experiences that eventually led me to study zoology and to find my calling in life in the struggle to conserve what is left of our natural world. My impressions are supported by the fact that Boyne River is the only real memory (aside from some vague recollection of a video about brook trout) I have of learning any relevant natural history throughout junior and senior public school. This was the only time during my formative years that the school system took me out to see and feel where I live, to experience the ecosystem of which I am a part.

As the years go by, I have become personally and professionally convinced that this connection to "place" is extremely important. During one portion of my career, I spent seven years working out in beautiful BC. While I was there, I truly missed Ontario's white pines and granite, the diversity of plants, and the lofty deciduous trees. Don't get me wrong: I loved BC with its great hikes a stone's throw from Vancouver and Clayoquot Sound, the latter of which has become one of my favourite places on earth. But the ecosystem where I feel most at home is here in southern Ontario.

I have spent 10 years working on Government of Canada programs in BC and Ontario that strive to preserve and sustain our nationally significant ecosystems. In both Ontario's Golden Horseshoe and BC's Fraser River Basin the challenges are first and foremost to build a conservation-oriented behavioural ethic among the residents of these

ecosystems. The majority of the population in the lower Great Lakes and the Lower Fraser Basin is highly urbanized and, especially in southern Ontario, disconnected from their home ecosystem. Most residents lack a sense of place in their natural world. It is highly unlikely that a new behavioural ethic will be spawned in an urban population with such a low level of appreciation for its own ecosystem and for the ecological footprint that it is creating.

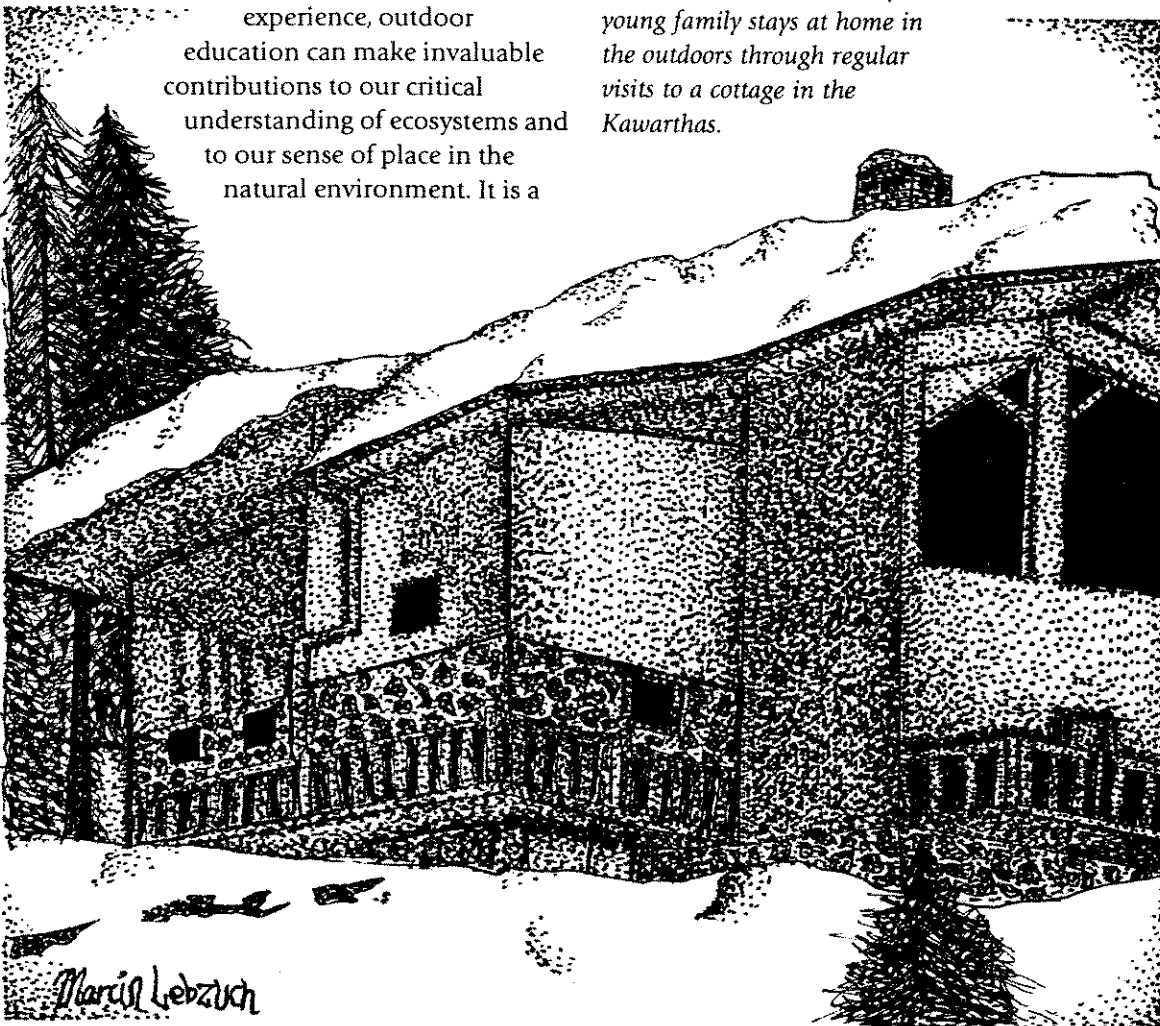
I have observed through my work that simply giving people information does not effectively help them to make fundamentally better environmental decisions or to substantively change their behaviours. They have to give a damn about the places they inhabit and the creatures with which they share the ecosystem. They have to "feel at home" in an environmental manner of speaking.

Based on my own experience, outdoor education can make invaluable contributions to our critical understanding of ecosystems and to our sense of place in the natural environment. It is a

form of education that needs to be nurtured if we are serious about maintaining our quality of life in Ontario and beyond.

I shudder to think that my own daughters may not have a Boyne River experience. I hope that, in our ever more urbanized world, little people will continue to be given a few days to make their way through a winter woodland, their small feet feeling the cold and their big eyes open to the world beyond the urban form and beyond the dead flicker of television.

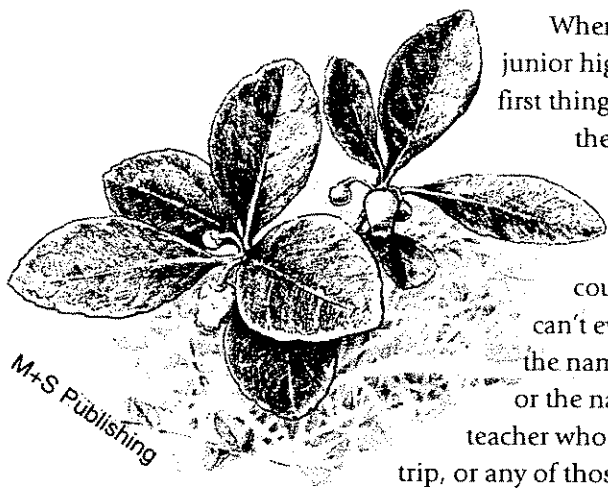
Carolyn O'Neill is a Senior Policy Advisor at Environment Canada, Ontario Region. She has recently completed an excellent educational resource for those who live in the Great Lakes Basin (and beyond). For a copy of Great Lakes Portraits, call 416-739-4809 or visit www.on.ec.gc.ca/coa/2001/coa-portraits-e.html. Carolyn's young family stays at home in the outdoors through regular visits to a cottage in the Kawarthas.



Marcin Lebzuch (MSS)

Immerse My Children — Please

by Gareth Thomson



When I think back to junior high school, the first thing I remember is the camp we attended as part of our geography course. Frankly, I can't even remember the name of the camp, or the name of the lead teacher who organized the trip, or any of those other terribly important details to which we adults like to cling.

But the memories I do retain are very powerful and very sweet. I remember breathless orienteering through the crunchy red leaves of Ontario autumn. I remember being handed an identification key and being asked to name some mystery tree — and my exultation at being able to blurt out “Black Cherry!” before the instructor had even turned to leave. I remember the trip’s Great Event, a hugely comic episode when Jimmy, the class clown, got caught among four students as they wrestled two canoes onto the dock, and the comedy of errors that resulted in him sitting, dripping and spluttering, in the water. I remember that someone, I forget who, showed me where to find the dark bitter beauty of the Wintergreen plant — and I’ve been foraging for it ever since. I remember, during one fireside skit, that my schoolmate Cathy Shields held all of us kids completely entranced by her acting ability. (In the spirit of full disclosure, I will here confess that I had a huge crush on her, so perhaps this has coloured my memory slightly.)

There was one most special moment, and, to my great surprise now, tears prick my eyes as

I remember it. At night, the entire group of 60 students took part in a teacher-led activity. At the end of the evening, we arose as one, lit our candles on the glowing embers of the campfire, spread out, and walked in glowing, candle-lit silence to the rocks overlooking the lake. And then, for a precious few minutes, we sat in a state of transfixed, shared wonder, as the stars danced with their echoes on the water and two invisible loons made their haunting, quavering calls. I felt something then — awe? holiness? — something that I had previously only felt at church on Christmas Eve.

So what is the value of that experience? At the time, of course, it held extraordinarily high value, or so it seemed, as, giddy and not a little sleep-deprived, I walked home humming with mental excitement after the bus had dropped us off at school.

“And then, for a precious few minutes, we sat in a state of transfixed, shared wonder, as the stars danced with their echoes on the water and two invisible loons made their haunting, quavering calls.”

And what is the value of that experience now that I am an adult? It is far too fuzzy a memory to answer definitively, but surely it is noteworthy that it remains the only event during those three years of junior high school that I remember with any clarity. There is

something about the positive intensity of the experience, there in that Ontario wildland setting in the company of my peers, for those golden few days.

“ . . . that special sense of awe and wonder that only wild places and wild things can give”

These days, I make my living as an environmental educator, working for an organization that is enlightened enough to allow me to pursue my hobby of wildland advocacy. Did our outdoor education experiences at camp create that? Sorry, these things are unknowable. But perhaps it played a part, possibly even a large part.

Walt Whitman once said, “Now I see the secret of the making of the best persons. It is to grow in the open air, and to eat and sleep with the earth.” And I believe him to be right. The summertime (and a lot of the spring and fall, too) finds me and my two pre-school children, Sarah and Jay, sleeping in a tent, either in my backyard or farther afield; whether they have what it takes to be counted among the “best persons” remains to be seen, but they seemed to have passed muster pretty well so far.

And I know there will come a time when Sarah and Jay will no longer view their mother or me as godlike beings, when they will crave the company of their peers rather than their parents. When that time comes, it is off to summer camp with them, for as long as we all can stand it, for the necessary immersion in friends and adventure and nature and games and laughter. Hopefully, their immersion experience will include that special sense of awe and wonder that only wild places and wild things can give, and if that immersion is carried to its literal extreme — like Jimmy, spluttering amongst the duckweed beside the dock — the

experience will probably only do them a heap of good.

Gareth Thomson is the Education Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, a non-profit, non-governmental society dedicated to the preservation of natural ecosystems. He has an engineering degree, an MSc in Environmental Geology and teacher certification. He has served on the executive of the Global Environmental and Outdoor Council of Alberta for the past decade. He continues to spend time on the hiking trails around Canmore.



Outdoor and Environmental Education Experiences Last a Lifetime

by Heather Wheeliker

My fondest memories of attending public school in Ottawa are of our trips to the MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre, which we all called “the Sugar Bush.” I couldn’t tell you where it is located — possibly out by Rockland? — and I can’t say for sure that it was an annual trip. But, between Grades 1 and 6 (1971–77), I went at least

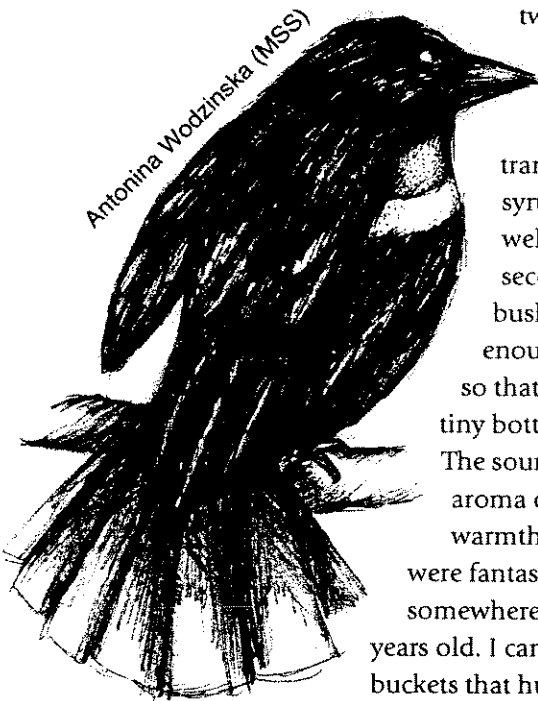
twice to collect sap from the maples and to watch as huge troughs of it were transformed into maple syrup. I remember being well prepared for my second visit to the sugar bush: I had saved up enough money over the year so that I could purchase *two* tiny bottles of this liquid gold! The sounds of nature, the aroma of wood smoke and the warmth in the sugar shack were fantastic. I would have been somewhere between six and eight years old. I can still see the big buckets that hung from the trees, and can almost taste that slightly sweet sap that dripped from the tapped maples.

That wasn’t our only reason for visiting MacSkimming. We went two other times: once in the fall for orienteering, and once in the spring. I remember being a little perturbed that we weren’t going to be emptying buckets of sap and tasting that syrup. But this trip turned out to be just as, if not more, exciting. We were going exploring with a very nice leader whose gender escapes me. We were checking traps for

small birds, and if we found a captured soul we were going to get to band it so that scientists could keep track of its whereabouts over time. Now, *this* was grand. Whether it was because I was the smallest in my class, the youngest or the quietest, I will never know, but our “expert leader” chose me to hold the little bird! He or she must have sensed that I was scared, so we traded responsibilities and, while the expert safely held the bird, I got to secure the leg band in place. It was unforgettable! I would have been 9 or 10, and that was the last time I visited MacSkimming.

In 1977, when I was 11 years old and entering Grade 7, my family moved from Ottawa to a part of the country rich in natural history, but without anyone to teach me about the environment. Too young to know what I wanted to be and in the absence of any sort of guidance, I graduated from university with a Bachelor of Arts, not trained “to be” anything in particular. I called MacSkimming. What educational background would I need to work there? I was told a Bachelor of Education. I guess I took the wrong route

“I spent hours on end exploring the balsam fir forest, the black spruce bog, the ponds, the wet meadows, the rocky coastline and the sandy shoreline.”



Antonina Wodzinska (MSS)

Still drawn to the natural world, I pursued a diploma in Environmental Science. Shortly after, I began working in the field of environmental education — where I still work, 12 years later. But I often think about my MacSkimming experiences. While I know I won't work there, I realize that a Bachelor of Education degree would be useful. Someday, I would like to expose students to the same sorts of unforgettable experiences I enjoyed at the outdoor education centre as a child.

There is nothing quite like being in the outdoors, feeling free and unconfined. But this feeling alone is not enough. When my family moved from Ottawa, I spent hours on end exploring the balsam fir forest, the black spruce bog, the ponds, the wet meadows, the rocky coastline and the sandy shoreline. I loved every minute of it, but learned very little. Without anyone to teach me and without books to teach myself, I simply explored. Now, as an adult, I am learning about those places I explored as a

child and as a teenager, and I get excited whenever I learn something new. But nothing compares to the guided experiences at MacSkimming. That is where I experienced *and* that is where I *learned*.

Heather Wheeliker is an Environmental Education Consultant who develops environmental education resources, offers workshops to teachers, and makes guest presentations to students. She covers a variety of topics such as soils and land reclamation, wetlands, stream ecology and species at risk. For the past 12 years, she has worked mostly for Alberta Environment in Edmonton, Alberta. Heather is currently enrolled in a first year biology course, and, with much excitement, is finally pursuing her Bachelor of Education degree.



Antonina

Antonina Wodzinska (MSS)

The Land is Like a Book

by Tom Andrews

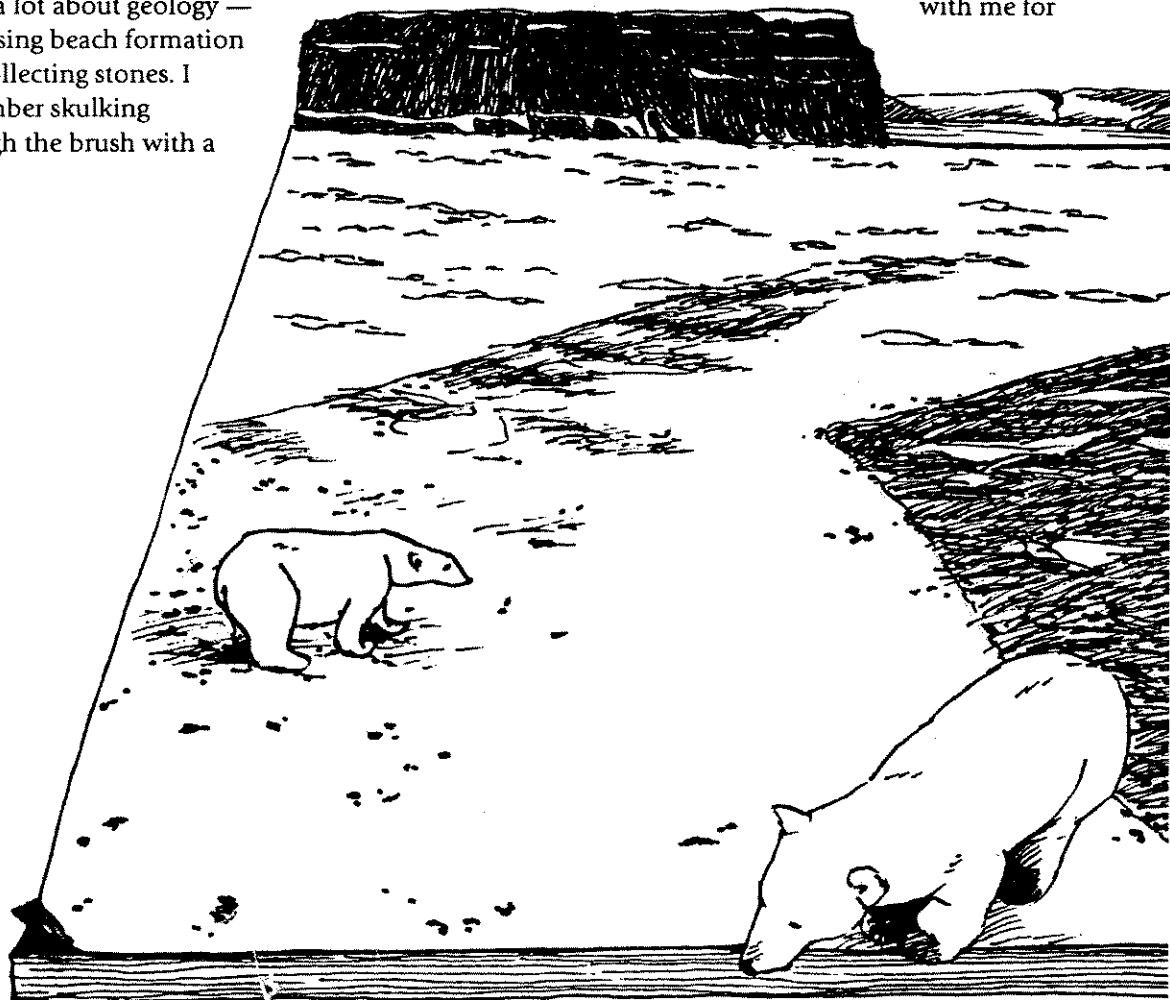
At some point in my young life as a student in the Toronto public school system I was fortunate enough to spend several days at the Toronto Island Natural Science School. Right off the bat, I have an admission to make: I can't remember what year it was, how many other students were involved, or the name of the elementary school I attended. Such are the realities of an aging memory. To be fair to myself though, it was a long time ago, probably 35 years or so; this would put me somewhere near Grade 6 or 7.

I do, however, have crystal clear memories of many of the things I did while there. I remember carefully removing small birds from a mist net and helping to band them. I remember walking along a sand beach with a geologist — or someone who knew a lot about geology — discussing beach formation and collecting stones. I remember skulking through the brush with a

strange contraption that looked like a cross between a shepherd's staff and a hangman's noose, trying to capture small owls. I remember being in a classroom with a wall of windows watching a thunderstorm pound the island, while learning about lightening and storm surges. I remember seeing an electric eel and being too timid to approach it too closely, though, in retrospect, I suspect it was a preserved specimen. I remember walking through a forest learning how to recognize tree species. I remember collecting bugs and looking at them through microscopes.

Though I recall few organizational details of the outdoor education centre, I remember many of the events mentioned above as though they happened just yesterday, and I suspect

they will stay
with me for



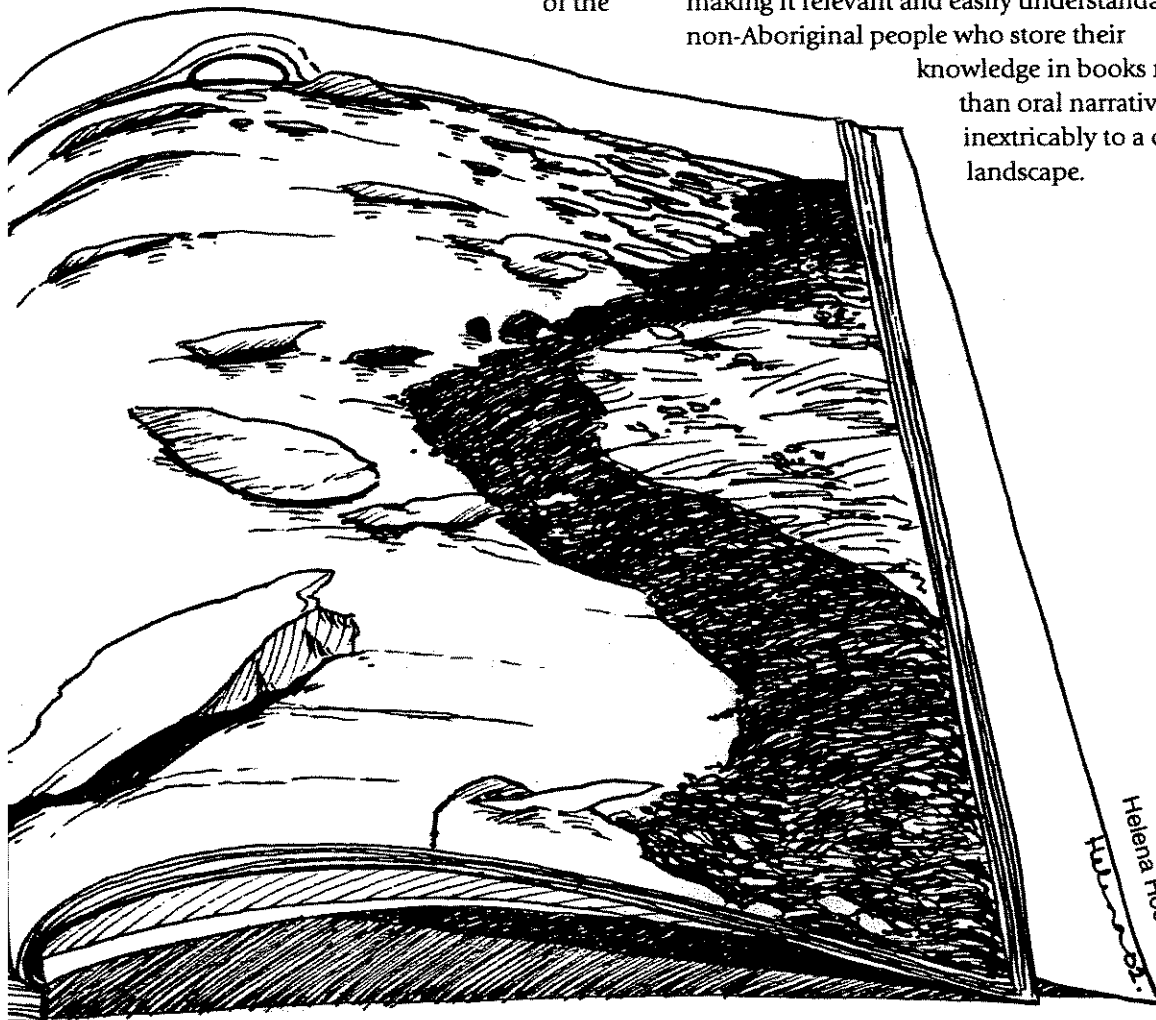
the rest of my life. At that point in my young life I was a passionate collector of rocks, minerals, and fossils, with a dream of becoming a palaeontologist. The Island School confirmed for me that a life dedicated to science was a good thing, and I entered university enrolled in geology, with the intent of switching to palaeontology later. During my first few years as a student I took several courses in archaeology to fill out my schedule and soon found that these courses ignited a new version of an old passion, leading me to spend my life learning about ancient cultures.

Today, as the Territorial Archaeologist for the Government of the Northwest Territories, I have spent the last 25 years working in northern Canada. My research over much of that time has been spent working in partnership with Dene elders, learning about their traditional place names, camping sites, and trails. This information is used to locate ancient evidence of their ancestors' use of the

same landscapes. By spending weeks out in the bush with the Dene elders and their families, I have learned something even more important, something that has given me a useful perspective on outdoor learning.

Dene elders have used the land as a means to teach younger generations through place names and stories that are associated with them. The stories, part of a rich oral tradition, contain information critical to the Dene's history, culture and subsistence, and the geographic features are used as mnemonic aids, helping the tellers to remember the stories. As young people traveled with their families they would be taught the names of places and the stories to go along with them. When they returned later as adults, they would remember the teachings through the mnemonic clue of the land. In this way, "the land is like a book," says Harry Simpson, a Dene elder from the Dogrib tribe. At once, this beautiful metaphor captures the essence of an ancient ethno-pedagogy, while also making it relevant and easily understandable for non-Aboriginal people who store their

knowledge in books rather than oral narratives tied inextricably to a cultural landscape.



The Tundra Ecological Research Station is a small facility on the remote yet stunningly beautiful Barren Lands. It consists of several Weatherhaven tents surrounded by a super-charged electric fence to keep grizzly bears away. Located on Daring Lake about 175 kilometres north of Yellowknife, it was established by the Government of the NWT to monitor the cumulative impact of diamond exploration and development on this environment. For the past seven years, I have helped to organize and instruct a summer program here for senior high school students from all over the territories. For ten days, the Tundra Science Camp becomes an intimate part of this research station.

Twelve students and three of their teachers explore and learn about Barren Lands ecology by working with whatever researchers happen to be resident at the time; their research projects become part of the curriculum through osmosis. The staff, mostly professional biologists, geologists, natural historians or educators from Yellowknife, provide instruction in botany, ornithology, wildlife biology, habitat assessment and environmental monitoring, fisheries studies, geology and geomorphology. I teach human history and archaeology using 20 nearby archaeological sites to provide the students with a unique perspective on the past. My friend Harry Simpson and his wife Elise attend as instructors, and the students gain from them a rich and unforgettable experience in Dogrib culture and history. The classes are held as formal and informal sessions outside, and each of the instructors uses the landscape or some element of it in these lessons. The land is like a book.

Over the years, our students have had many remarkable experiences as part of their camp projects: observing a female grizzly bear feed two cubs over a period of 12 hours; recording data on peregrine falcon nests, part of an endangered species program; accompanying Harry on a caribou hunt; learning how to prepare and tan a caribou hide; studying arctic plants and their adaptation to cold environments; mapping archaeological sites; walking for kilometres along an esker — a periglacial wonder of monumental proportions — and having access to all the “experts” at one

time! If we’re lucky, our visit to the camp — which is always scheduled over the July-August transition — will coincide with the fall migration of the Bathurst Caribou herd, allowing the students to experience the grandeur of a carpet of thousands of animals moving in a gregarious mass. The daily possibility of seeing grizzly bears, wolverines, wolves, and arctic foxes adds spice, while learning to tolerate the hordes of mosquitoes and black flies builds moral fibre.

During quiet moments at the camp, I often reflect on my experience at the Toronto Island Natural Science School. I know that the excitement and pleasure I see on the faces of these students matches my own of so many years ago, and I am grateful for the opportunity to give back, offering to others the same kind of experience I had as a young scientist. For the last five years, I have been able to take my own daughter with me, and we look forward each year to spending time together at the camp. She was only five years old the first time she visited the science camp, and though the excitement of hanging out with teenagers often outranked a lesson on botany or archaeology (and still does), I am constantly struck by how much of a learning experience it has been for her. At home, perhaps in response to an item heard on the radio or to a particular portion of a school project, she will express a deep and thoughtful understanding of some aspect of Barren Lands ecology that is well beyond her years. It makes me reflect on the positive impact the camp has on the other youth who attend it. For me, the Tundra Science Camp is an opportunity to try to ignite in the youth of today a passion that was lit for me many years ago. It is also an opportunity to follow the tradition of the Dene, and to use the land as a teacher.

Tom Andrews has conducted research in the northern Yukon and in the Mackenzie Valley of the Northwest Territories since the late 1970s. He currently works at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre in Yellowknife as the Territorial Archaeologist for the NWT. He has worked extensively with the Dene people and continues to take part in archaeological fieldwork throughout the territories.

Toronto Parks and Recreation: The Inner City Out-tripping Centre

by Emily Root

For those of us who love to paddle, who grew up at a summer camp or at a cottage on a lake, the following passage from James Benidickson is one with which we can readily identify:

There is a secret influence at work in the wild places of the North that seems to cast a spell over the men who have once been in them. One can never forget the lakes of such wonderful beauty, the rivers, peaceful or turbulent, and quiet portage paths, or the mighty forests of real trees. It is really getting to know Canada, to go where these things are. After having made camps along the water routes, one feels a proud sense of ownership of that part of the country. Which must develop into a deeper feeling of patriotism in regard to the whole land (1978, p. 44).

But, for an increasing number of inner city Canadians who do not have such opportunities to experience our great outdoors, Ontario author Wayland Drew paints a very different reality:

... concrete-and-steel roaring, that blaring and screeching of traffic that never stop[s] ... smells ... pure carbon-stink ... The city I remember is all grey — grey in its buildings, grey in its sky and its streets, grey in its very soul. Grey rain falls on it. Grey sewage spills

out of it into a lake that was once green, long ago. People said, 'But there are movies! There are plays and concerts, galleries and museums! There is clothing! Look at the clothes! Look at the colour!' ... It was like some crazy, swirling dream, or pathetic efforts to make up for something lost (1989, p. 29).

And, so, the romantic images of canoes and pristine wilderness that some of us feel are an integral part of our national identity are far from the reality that many Canadians experience living in inner city Toronto. Many young people, especially those from lower income families, visible minority groups, or families who have recently immigrated to Canada, are disconnected from nature. They lack connection to the land and its history. A telling example of this is the story of a young girl in a Toronto Parks and Recreation program who, in response to the question, "What is the environment?" replied, "The environment is when you get on a bus and drive to the centre and go inside to look at the nice displays" (Crawford, personal communication, December 2, 2001).

Consider the following statistics: Seventy percent of families with higher incomes send their children to summer camp, while only 16% of lower income families send their children (Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2001). Eighty percent of people in Canada live in urban centres; fifty-three percent of Torontonians belong to visible minority groups (Crawford). A quick glance around the Toronto Sportsman Show or the Outdoor Adventure

Show (or, for that matter, the dining hall at a COEO conference) reveals that the majority of those involved in outdoor pursuits are upper-middle-class Caucasians. Clearly, many Canadians miss out on the types of wilderness experiences that some of us would argue are the definition of the Canadian identity. If we feel that wilderness experiences help to create connections between the people, land and history of Canada, then we need to recognize the value of developing such bonds for a much broader cross-section of our population.

The Inner City Out-Tripping Centre (ICOC), a division of Toronto Parks and Recreation, provides programs for Toronto youth who do not have the opportunity to participate in wilderness experiences. Its main focus is to provide opportunities for youth to discover the natural environment within their urban community, namely, its many parks, ravines and green spaces. The goal here is for participants to connect with nature locally, so that the natural world and an appreciation of it becomes part of daily life rather than something that exists only outside the city.

ICOC programs were introduced in 1997 when James Caldwell and Allan Crawford first worked together to provide an opportunity for Hispanic and Portuguese gang members from the Christie Pitts area to paddle in north canoes. This group went on to win the National North Canoe Challenge that year in Peterborough.

Since that time, ICOC program development has been guided by Caldwell's vision that today's urban youth will become the "Stewards of the New Millennium" (Caldwell, 2001). He believes that these youth will be responsible for passing on to future generations a sense of heritage and connection to our land and history, and an understanding of the importance of caring for the environment. He also feels that they are not yet as yet prepared for this role. How can they become stewards when they remain

disconnected from the people, places, nature and history of their own neighbourhood and city?

Programs at the ICOC are geared towards various ages and interest groups. Most follow the 3 S's principle: they are solid, sustained and supported. The ICOC also strives to be an integrated and incremental program where participants take on increasing responsibility and more challenging tasks. In keeping with the organization's "Give to Get" model, adolescents who volunteer their time to help out with programs for younger children (e.g., the daylong Paddle and Picnic program) are given the opportunity to participate in more advanced wilderness and leadership experiences.

"As outdoor educators, we need to help all youth develop deep, personal and long-lasting connections to the natural world."

The annual canoe race, "Hustle up the Humber," allows adolescents to discover one of Canada's Heritage Rivers without leaving the city. Students, many of whom live in the densely populated Jane/Finch area, hop on a subway in order to get to the river for regular practice. One day, when Crawford was paddling with a group, a boy asked which way the river was flowing. The answer, of course, was, "Towards the lake." The boy asked, "And where is the lake?" The group landed up paddling to the end of the river, and the boy saw Lake Ontario for the first time ever.

When confronted with funding challenges, Crawford has always been able to take a "just do it" approach. This has been made possible by the many partners that the ICOC has recruited over the years; these include the

Toronto Police and Emergency Services, the Toronto Board of Education, Project Canoe, the Anishnabek Police Services, the Canadian Canoe Museum and the Hispanic Development Council. Crawford points out that educators should always try to find ways to provide outdoor and environmental programs, whether or not a centre or subject exists. If today's youth are to become stewards of the new millennium, then how can we afford *not* to provide them with quality outdoor opportunities that will help them develop connections to the land, history and people of their community?

The ICOC is now ready to take its youth programs one step further. It has exciting plans to build a leadership and environmental centre on the city-owned historic site of Rousseau Fort. This site was once a meeting place for people who would eventually travel north on our far-reaching Canadian waterways.

Mackenzie, Brébeuf and Rousseau are a few of the well-known explorers who passed through this area. The Rousseau Centre will provide experiences that speak to the human spirit, allowing Canadians to reconnect to the environment and our heritage.

Toronto City Councillor David Miller has kept the proposed centre on track by securing funds for preliminary sketches and ensuring that the building is environmentally sustainable. Thirty bunks at the centre will provide a place for the ICOC to host exchange students from outside of the city. Crawford hopes that this will also lead to opportunities for inner city youth to visit rural communities. Such an exchange program could help to develop connections and understanding between young Canadians living in vastly different environments. While excitement over such plans has not as yet led to construction, Crawford remains optimistic: he borrows a quote from fellow canoeist Ted Cowan: "The direction is straight ahead. All plans are subject to change. Just keep paddling!"

Crawford believes that the ICOC philosophy serves as an excellent reminder of the bigger picture. All educators have the privilege and responsibility of influencing youth to become Stewards of the New Millennium. And we face the challenge of educating youth from vastly different environments. As outdoor educators, we need to help *all* youth develop deep, personal and long-lasting connections to the natural world. Fostering such connections is the first and perhaps most important step in teaching about the country we live in — the science, geography and history of the land and the groups of people the land has supported. By connecting to the land and its history, Canadian youth develop a sense of heritage — a sense of belonging to a place and being part of a legacy that spans well before and beyond their lifetimes.

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Emily Root is a graduate of McMaster and also the Queen's Outdoor and Experiential Education program. She currently teaches Kindergarten and Physical Education at Tawingo College near Huntsville. Her favourite outdoor activities include canoeing, camping, downhill and cross-country skiing. This is Emily's debut as a regular contributor to Pathways.

Boondoggles and Outdoor Education

by Ted Leew

Several years ago, I joined my eldest son Blake when his Grade 8 outdoor education class went on a three-day canoe trip. I was the sceptical parent volunteer who joined two teachers and eighteen kids for this expedition late in October.

My attitude going in was that school is hard, and life is hard, and work is hard. School should be about learning the skills you need to support yourself in this world rather than asking the federal government to take care of you with other people's money. I probably also thought that you should be inside a brick school building working with pen and paper to learn those skills. I was against boondoggles and adolescents escaping school to play with each other in the forest on school time. "Outdoor education" sounded like camping with chicks to me, and camping was something I did as a boy with my dad after I finished all my schoolwork, not instead of it. How's that for attitude?

"They learned how to be confident, and they learned this in ways that they could apply to planning and implementing anything."

I still think most of that. But, as I participated in this trip, I saw that it was a tremendous learning experience for the kids. They were seeing and doing things that they might not have any other opportunity to experience. It was a very different and far more informative experience than my childhood cub camps. Some people probably find these opportunities for themselves, and some few probably create them for their kids, or think that they do, but most of us don't know how or don't have the time and energy. Yet this type of

experience is part of educating our kids, because educating them involves not just giving them workplace survival skills, but also self-confidence and self-respect, and a benevolent and informed view of nature.

What did the kids see and do on this trip? They saw and participated in the thinking and organizing and social skills that go into planning and then completing a journey (and they did it outdoors, close to the water and sleeping outside). They were responsible for all the logistics: the food, equipment, packing, travel, campsites, canoes, safety, etc. Even a concern as basic as water became a major task. We had to carry all the drinking water we would need for three days on the river. It was very heavy, and a very big deal; you learn how precious the stuff is.

The students were also responsible for getting along with each other. A small thing: we all had to know where the slowest canoe was; it was never Blake and I because I paddled hard enough to outrace (it was a race, wasn't it?) most of the 14-year-olds. But the bottom line was that everyone knew how important it was to not separate or ostracize anyone, either on the river or in camp. Everyone had to plan, bring and then prepare and serve a couple of meals for their three- or four-person group; if someone in a team decided to be irresponsible, three or four people wouldn't eat.

They learned how to enjoy themselves and their surroundings on a canoe trip. They learned how to be confident, and they learned this in ways that they could apply to planning and implementing anything. We were a team, coordinated, all in it together, each responsible for his or her own food, water and canoe, and also for helping the group to succeed and enjoy our experiences together. And I think it was evident to all of us how expert and hardworking the lead teacher was; it's healthy for kids to see someone earn their respect, and to perhaps get an idea of the kind of person

that we should all try to be.

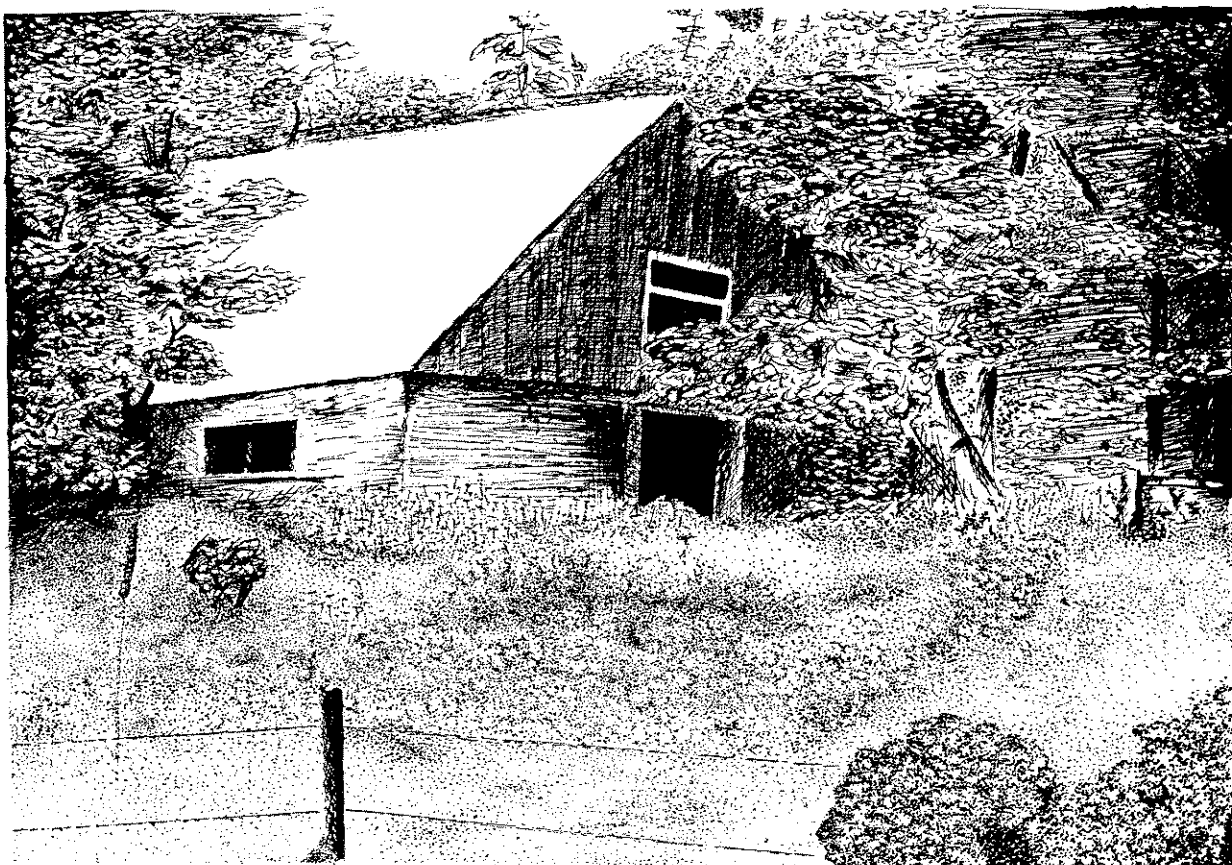
The “outdoors” side of it was pretty much left to just happen — the water and birds and cliffs were all around us for 24 hours a day, but there were no lectures about the flora or fauna we were passing, or even the geology. (We were in the Drumheller badlands and dinosaur park country.) I guess I might have thought it would have been better if there was a little of that, but maybe the teachers were wise not to make it seem too much like the indoor classroom. We were not out there to do the same things you can do with books in a classroom, but to learn some broader lessons and in a different way.

Anyway, I was very impressed with how much organization had gone into this trip, and how good the kids were to each other, and how relaxed and confident everybody was as a result. I think it was a more powerful growing experience for all the kids than they may have known. And I thought that two or three days in

the classroom would have been a waste by comparison.

I came back thinking that kids still need to know how to read and do math, but that life is about solving problems and getting along with people. You are better educated if you can see the world and how we get along in it from a different perspective once in a while. I had a great time, and I came back physically tired but very content. If it had rained, or it had been an organizational fiasco, or if some of the kids had been brats, I might have missed the point. But none of that happened, and I didn't.

Ted Leew was VP, Legal and General Counsel, Norcen Energy Resources for eight years. He continues to work as a consulting lawyer for oil and gas companies at a private law firm in Calgary. Skiing, golfing and running marathons are his favourite outdoor activities. He would still like to take up canoeing some time.



Jessica Moulton (MSS)

Memories from Northumberland County

by Jennifer Dallman

When I was in elementary school, the field trip of all field trips was the one to the Northumberland Outdoor Education Centre. We would go once a year starting in kindergarten and, every year, we could not wait for our class's turn to spend a day in the "wilderness." I grew up in Cobourg, Ontario, went to Burnham Public School and, when I was eight years old, would have sworn on a stack of bibles that the outdoor education centre was at least an hour's bus ride from the school. (It was only years later, when my parents moved north of town, that I realized the centre is only ten minutes from my school.) I still remember the weeklong build-up to the trip, filled with environmental theme projects and lessons on what to wear when heading out for a day in the winter.

Anticipation aside, the adventure began the minute the bus parked at a clearing beside the road and we all tumbled out. I still remember how to get to the cabin: "When entering the woods, make sure you stay on the marked path so that no one gets lost. You will ruin everyone's fun if you get lost!" The trail led us down a muddy slope, which was always much more fun to descend after it had rained or snowed. We then crossed a stream on a makeshift bridge, and were all so proud when we made it to the other side without falling in. Our final obstacle before making it to the safety and warmth of the cabin was a humungous hill. Looking back, I am sure it is not as big as I remember, but I do recall it being large enough and steep enough to cause some students to slide backwards in a sort of 'one step forward, two steps back' hill climb.

The trek to the cabin was our introduction to each outdoor education experience. The hiking, skiing, snowshoeing, nature games and

experiments were the main events and even more exciting than the food. You know students are having a great time when they don't want to stop for lunch. During these lessons and games, I learned things I am still forcing on unsuspecting people 15 years later. My favourite quote from the outdoor education centre is "Remember to dress like an onion, because you can always take layers off, but you can't always put them on." I am currently living in Yellowknife and, as I write at this moment it is -31°C outside; you can imagine how much mileage I get out of this expression.

I loved the Northumberland Outdoor Education Centre so much that my parents held my ninth birthday party there. It was the most memorable party of my youth with outdoor games and hikes, fire roasted hotdogs and marshmallows. Although I have not been back to the centre in a decade and a half, I can still feel the excitement that I felt then at the prospect of spending the day hiking and learning about the natural environment around me. Some of my best memories from elementary school come from there, and I hope that today's students are as excited about their outdoor education experiences as I was.

Jennifer Dallman works for the non-profit Arctic Energy Alliance in Yellowknife, NWT. She feels that she gained an ongoing respect for the environment and its intricacies as a result of her outdoor education experiences. This serves her well as she teaches others about the complex issue of climate change and helps them to decide upon appropriate individual responses to this global problem. Jennifer never tires of hiking the many trails that can be found in and around Yellowknife.

Lessons From Outside the Zoo: Nature, Education and Environmental Literacy

by Tom Berryman

My memories of our school's annual trip to the zoo are different from those of most others. Its displays of wild animals in captivity taught me little about nature. What I most remember, what has left a deep and lasting imprint, is going over the fence, away from the zoo, and into the wild. I remember heading for a forested canopy with childhood friends. Once there, we would rock hop up and down a clear brook. We would read the rocks: we would try to figure out how slippery they were, their stability and the distance between them in order to give the correct impulse to our series of jumps. It was a truly amazing mental and physical challenge. And it was great fun.

Since these trips, I have learned much about the vital importance of nature: it gives birth to and supports all life and its biodiversity is a key factor in five billion years of evolution. The values of nature are found in so many different areas: scientific, aesthetic, cultural, recreational, symbolic, sanitary, religious, philosophical, economic, and a great deal more. And, there are so many urgent issues to be addressed regarding the state of natural environments. To me and to many others, learning about nature seems basic and essential to any meaningful education.

However, my trips to the zoo as well as many other experiences have taught me that facts alone will not motivate action. When I think about the advertising world, I realize that facts, information and cognition are not the key factors that influence our consuming behaviours. Ads mostly appeal to emotions and desires. This is a tough lesson to learn for a biologist who has been raised to believe that the presentation of scientific truths motivates proper action. It is also a huge challenge for an education system that strives to create responsible citizens. Presumably, this goal includes people who know, respect and defend the life sustaining systems of Earth.

So, if facts alone are not sufficient, what can help to achieve such a sense of responsibility? The cultivation of morals can contribute, but I see at least three difficulties here. First, morality alone can remain a set of abstract ideas. Second, the attraction of the forbidden can play against the teaching. Finally, there is the danger of a backlash. I'm told that this last aspect is already evident in university students who are fed up with environmental issues.

Should we attend to reality by having schools address real environmental issues? This can also contribute but, once again, there are some difficulties. First, identifying problems that can be defined and solved by children is difficult considering the complexity of many environmental issues. Second, these problems are not necessarily enjoyable and fulfilling realities to address. Unsolved problems can be a dread. Finally, I believe that most if not all of these problems should not be transferred to schools in the hope that the children will solve them now or in the future. Maybe we should stand up, take responsibility and do it ourselves as adults.

Should we address environmental issues through new educational approaches and packages, new CD-ROMs, the Internet,

"What I most remember, what has left a deep and lasting imprint, is going over the fence, away from the zoo, and into the wild."

multimedia, theme parks and other interactive high-tech sophistications? They can be of some help, but many pitfalls also lie on such a path. Children already spend so many hours each day in front of a TV screen. Does adding or

substituting some hours with an interactive screen seem such an improvement? We already have a quite heavy dose of virtual nature in many educational programs. Do we need to add more?

Living mostly in an environment built by humans and for humans, both children and adults are already quite distant from the natural world. So many layers already stand between each person and the real natural world. All sorts of instruments already act as prostheses that do not necessarily facilitate direct encounters with nature. Do we need to add yet others? That is, do we need more screens, buttons and levers to comprehend what life is made of? Are we losing so much of our ability to be in touch with the wonders of the sensitive world that we can only feed on purified images of it? By being so connected to electronic multimedia, we might well be severing the meaningful and lasting connections with the natural world that we so desperately need.

Facts, morality, problem solving of real environmental issues, and pleasant new high-tech tools don't seem to be enough to foster a caring and responsible attitude towards the environment. Some studies have searched to identify what happened in the childhood of

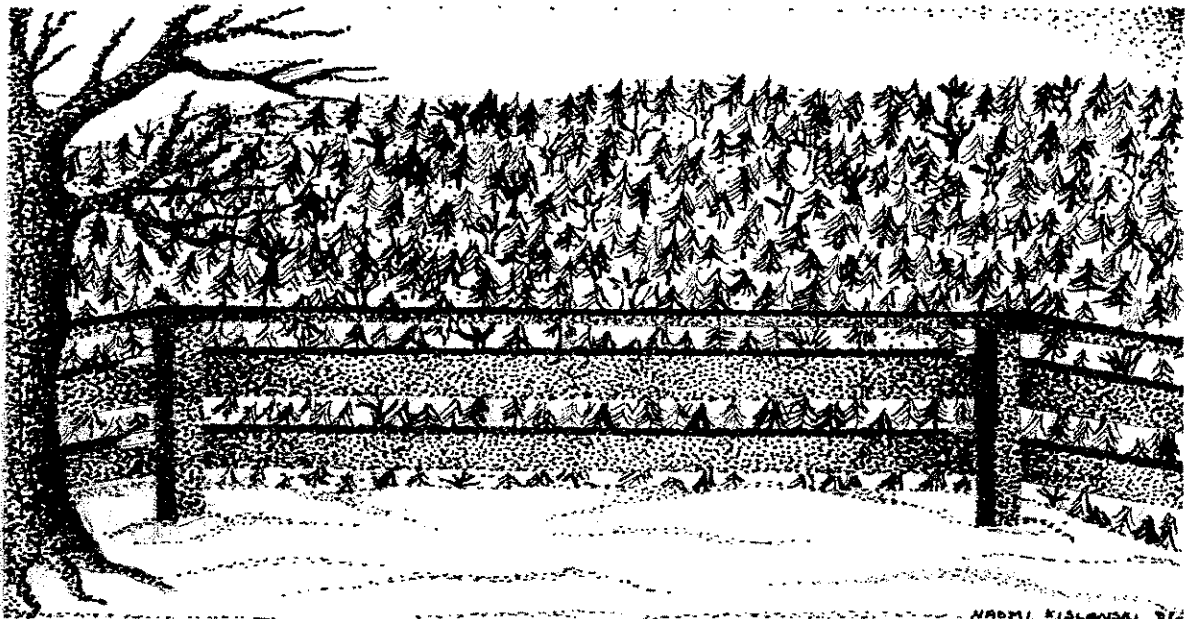
committed adult environmentalists in order to give them such strong ecological values. A common and simple pattern emerged.

According to research conducted by Louise Chawla, most environmentalists attribute their commitment to "many hours spent outdoors in a keenly remembered wild or semi-wild place in childhood or adolescence, and an adult who taught respect for nature" (1992, p. 84).

"By being so connected to electronic multimedia, we might well be severing the meaningful and lasting connections with the natural world that we so desperately need."

In other words, in order to care for nature, dwell in nature. It is simple, but what happens on these occasions is not. For many, it leads to the sudden discovery of being wrapped in a world so large and so complex, enveloped in a universe that supports and contains us entirely,

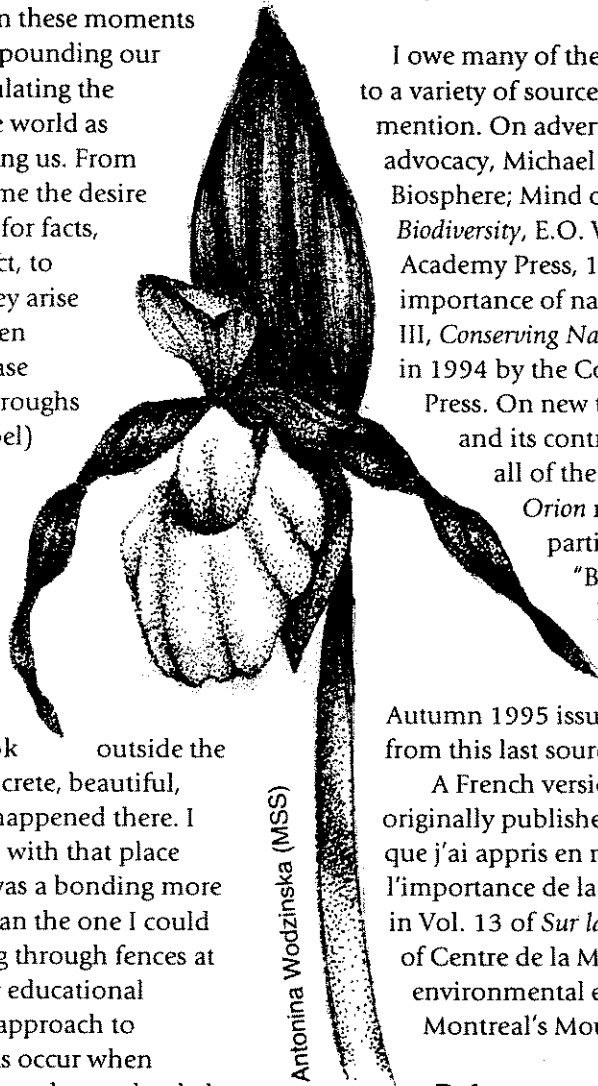
Naomi Kislanski (MSS)



a world that we will never fully understand, control or manipulate. In these moments and places, instead of expounding our usual attitude of manipulating the world, we experience the world as controlling and containing us. From such experiences will come the desire to dwell more, to search for facts, to develop moral conduct, to solve problems when they arise and to use new tools when needed in order to increase understanding. John Burroughs (as quoted by David Sobel) puts it this way: "knowledge without love will not stick. But if love comes first, knowledge is sure to follow."

This brings us back to my rock hopping in the brook outside the zoo. Something real, concrete, beautiful, complex and full of life happened there. I had an occasion to bond with that place with all of my being. It was a bonding more easy and spontaneous than the one I could have had by only looking through fences at captive animals. Can our educational system adapt to such an approach to learning? Can such events occur when school curricula are more and more loaded with objectives and divided into so many categories? Suppose action needs to be taken regarding the fate of a brook. I think I would probably be apt to rise to the occasion because of the river walking that happened outside the zoo, certainly more apt than if my rock hopping had only involved a joystick and an animated figure jumping from virtual rock to virtual rock on the water-blue pixels of a computer monitor.

So, what comes out of all this? Go ahead: enjoy the mountain and other myriad of wild places large or small. And, don't forget: bring the company of children, and take your time.



Antonina Wodzinska (MSS)

Postscript

I owe many of the ideas expressed above to a variety of sources, three of which I will mention. On advertising and nature advocacy, Michael Soulé's "Mind in the Biosphere; Mind of the Biosphere" in *Biodiversity*, E.O. Wilson editor, National Academy Press, 1986. On the importance of nature, Holmes Rolston III, *Conserving Natural Value*, published in 1994 by the Columbia University Press. On new thinking about nature and its contribution in education, all of the writing appearing in *Orion* magazine, and particularly David Sobel's "Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education" appearing in the Autumn 1995 issue. Both quotes come from this last source.

A French version of this paper was originally published under the title "Ce que j'ai appris en me sauvant du zoo: de l'importance de la nature en éducation" in Vol. 13 of *Sur la montagne*, the bulletin of Centre de la Montagne, the environmental education centre in Montreal's Mount Royal Park.

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Tom Berryman has a degree in Biology and a Master in Education degree that focussed on the links between child development and environmental relationships. He is currently involved in environmental education research through a PhD program at the Université du Québec à Montréal. His regular walks in Mount Royal Park and other urban wildlands as well as along the shores of the St. Lawrence River are integral to his explorations of person-place relationships.

The Woods Are Lovely, Dark and Deep

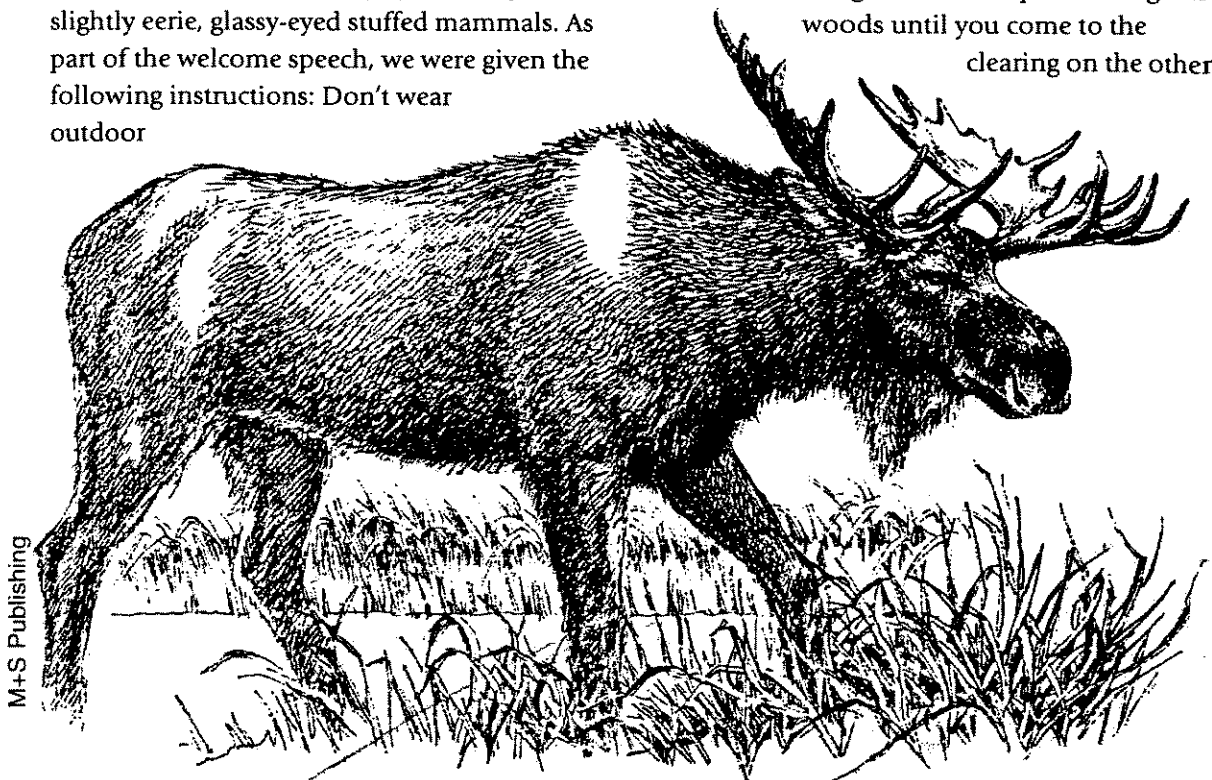
by Stephanie Dawson

I recently spent a week at the Toronto District School Board's Pine River Outdoor Education Centre as part of my month-long teaching practicum with a Grade 6 class. I went on hikes, played Animal Instincts for Survival, and made cedar tea in a teepee. I played Connect Four with my students, watched birds through binoculars, and even won the Greatest Table Award at dinner (acknowledged with a stuffed moose mounted on a wooden block). All of these activities brought back memories of my own experiences in Grade 6 at the Sheldon Centre for Outdoor Education, then part of the East York Board of Education.

How exciting it was to be going away with all my friends and without my parents! Upon our arrival at Sheldon, we unloaded our gear, scrambled for a top bunk, and then gathered in a carpeted lounge that was populated by silent, slightly eerie, glassy-eyed stuffed mammals. As part of the welcome speech, we were given the following instructions: Don't wear outdoor

shoes inside. Don't go into the dorm of the opposite sex. Don't make more than three pushes on the tap for one shower. And, oh yeah, have fun.

The most striking thing for me at Sheldon was how dark it got at night. I had been camping with my family up north where it becomes pitch black in the wee small hours, but it always came as a surprise and slight discomfort how dark it actually got. These feelings changed when Hawkeye (such an apt name for an outdoor education teacher) took my class on a night hike. He stopped us at the edge of a forest where there was a path disappearing into its silent reaches. We could barely see beyond the first few trees. Only the stars were visible, dots of light against a deep blackness. Then Hawkeye gave us our challenge: follow the path through the woods until you come to the clearing on the other



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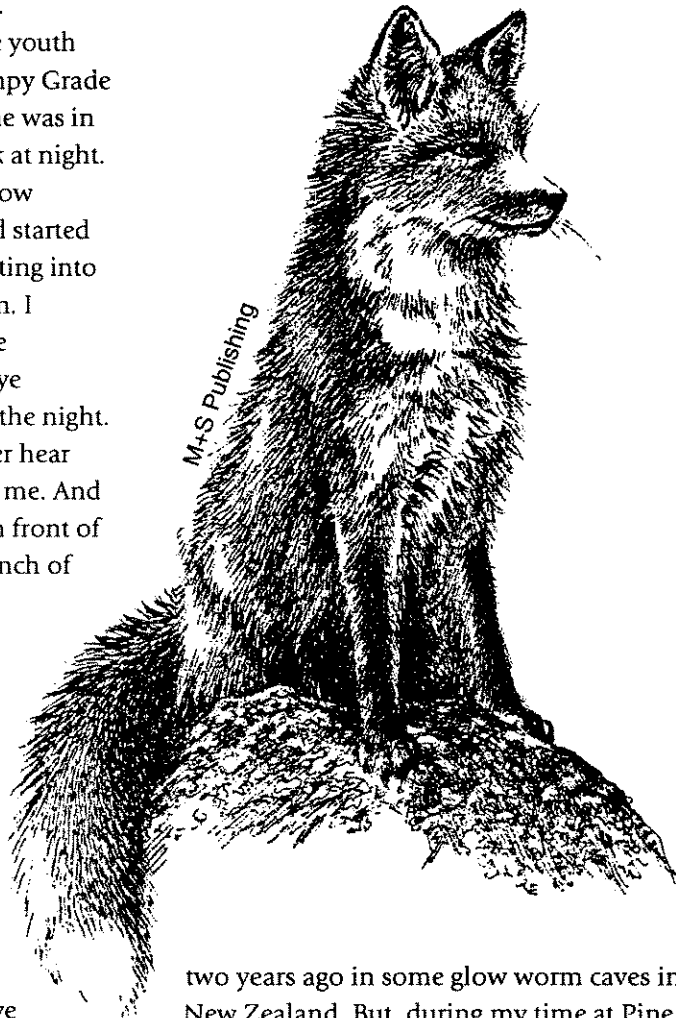
side . . . and do it alone and in silence.

A daunting task for a brave Native youth on his vision quest, let alone for a jumpy Grade 6 student who was convinced someone was in her house every time she heard a creak at night. But I couldn't show my fear to my fellow classmates. Already, some of them had started along the path, their fuzzy figures melting into the darkness. And, then, it was my turn. I stepped up to the rock that marked the beginning of my solo journey. Hawkeye whispered, "Okay," and I moved into the night.

After a few paces, I could no longer hear the shuffling of my classmates behind me. And I couldn't see the back of the person in front of me. All I was aware of was the soft crunch of my feet on the ground, and this impenetrable blackness that filled the air right up to my eyes. For a few brief minutes, I felt like I had been transported far away from Sheldon, and that my classmates and teachers were no longer around me. I was alone in this silent bubble of darkness. Alone, and perfectly comfortable.

Then, all of a sudden, I came to the clearing. The treetops overhead gave way to a starry sky and I could make out the outlines of the people who had gone before me. We stood silently (a great accomplishment for any Grade 6 class, I'm sure) until we had all made it through the woods. Hawkeye congratulated us on successfully completing our task without noise and he then told us a story about an Indian princess who was supposedly buried nearby.

I've forgotten the myth, but I still very much remember the experience. It was the first time in my life that I'd ever felt completely safe and comfortable in darkness. It's still not a feeling I get often, especially in the city. The last time I remember experiencing it was almost



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two years ago in some glow worm caves in New Zealand. But, during my time at Pine River, I joined a group whose task it was to walk silently across a dark meadow. And, for a few seconds, in the middle of that field, I was reminded of the time I walked peacefully through the night in the Sheldon valley.

Stephanie Dawson is currently completing her teacher training at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) with the University of Toronto. She has pursued her love of the outdoors around the world including India, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. She is interested both in teaching Grade 4 and pursuing a writing career.

Other Supportive Voices

Compiled by Grant Linney

Dr. David Suzuki: Scientist, Broadcaster, Author, Environmentalist

The following excerpt is taken from a letter written by Dr. Suzuki, the entire text of which appears in the Spring 2001 issue of Pathways. Dr. Suzuki's reference to leading scientists has to do with the "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity," published by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) in April 1997. Over 1700 scientists from 71 countries including the 19 largest economic powers and the 12 most populous nations signed this powerful and far-reaching document. The UCS Web site is www.ucsusa.org.

Leading scientists, including more than half of all Nobel Prize winners, tell us we are on a collision course with the life support systems of the earth. It is urgent that we understand we are still biological beings, embedded in and still dependent on the enormous services performed by nature for us. Nothing can be more important in an increasingly uncertain world beset by massive issues of climate change, toxic pollution of air, water and soil, deforestation, species extinction, marine devastation, overpopulation, overconsumption, and so on. These are the issues of our time and they have been created and made worse by our failure to recognize that we are still a part of nature. Outdoor education programs are invaluable for reconnecting children. . . . I think outdoor education is one of the most basic parts of education and ought to be a mandatory part of every curriculum in the country. It is not a frill or luxury; it is fundamental if we are to meet the real issues of our time.

"... outdoor education ... ought to be a mandatory part of every curriculum in the country."

Dr. Stephen Johnson: Head of the Preparatory School, Upper Canada College

This following is an excerpt from a letter written in response to parents excusing their son from a week of classes that included a three-day visit to the Norval Outdoor School.

The fact that the week away partially overlaps with Norval appears to be a coincidence and, at first glance, one may think that this is better than missing a week of academic time. For future reference, I thought it important to say that while homework can be 'made up,' the Norval experience cannot. Some of the most important personal and social lessons we have to teach the boys are built upon the foundation established at our Norval Outdoor School: the development and building of 1) a better relationship with his Form Master; 2) class identity; and 3) self-confidence and self-awareness. Norval also provides the opportunity to practice and appreciate the transferable skills of persistence, listening, empathy, problem solving, group work and risk taking in a different environment outside the classroom. Finally, there is a body of working knowledge of the property, its flora and fauna, environmental awareness and map reading.

In Memoriam

In the December 31, 2001 edition of *The National Post*, there is a particularly poignant death notice for Jonathon Robert Hungerford, a 21 year-old whose young life was tragically cut short by cancer. In lieu of flowers, the piece suggests that donations in memory of this young man be sent to the Prince of Wales Secondary School TREK Outdoor program (Vancouver, BC) where Jonathan first developed his love for the natural environment and for outdoor adventure. It is also worth noting that TREK is the program that David Suzuki so glowingly refers to in his letter of support for outdoor education (see *Pathways*, Spring 2001).

Gord Miller: Environmental Commissioner of Ontario

As an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario monitors and reports on compliance by provincial ministries with the Environmental Bill of Rights.

This excerpt is taken from verbal remarks made by Gord Miller when presenting Having Regard, his 2000/2001 Annual Report, at a press conference on October 1, 2001.

Another developing concern relates to our education system. This year we had a request to review the need for environmentally significant decisions of the Ministry of Education to be brought under the Environmental Bill of Rights. It was turned down because it was claimed that few if any policy decisions of the Ministry of Education were environmentally significant. This, at a time when decisions have been made to cancel environmental science and outdoor education programs throughout the school system.

I am gravely concerned that at a time when there is a critical need for the people of Ontario to understand complex environmental issues, and at a time when a majority of Ontario's youth are growing up in urban settings more detached from the natural environment than ever before . . . we are decoupling environmental science from the education system and denying the public the right to participate in decisions regarding the environmental education of our children. I do not see how this serves the long-term interests of a sustainable environment.

The following excerpt is taken from Having Regard, the 2000/2001 Annual Report of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, p. 164–166. Copies of this report may be ordered by phone (416-325-0363) or e-mail (resource.centre@eco.on.ca). See also the Environmental Commissioners Web page: www.eco.on.ca

Even though environmental education is a critical prerequisite to good environmental decision-making at all levels, there is no opportunity for public scrutiny or input into the quality of environmental education provided to Ontario students. . . . The Ministry of Education has a key role in helping to ensure that Ontario students receive a sound environmental education, including a solid grounding in the underlying science and technology issues. Education on environmental issues is important for the following reasons:

1. There is a critical need for Ontario's public to understand complex environmental issues that affect their day-to-day lives. The EBR (Environmental Bill of Rights) is predicated on the value of informed public comment on government decision-making.
2. Most of Ontario's population now lives in urban locations, and children in urban settings have far less contact with the natural environment on a daily basis than children of previous generations. They have less daily access to wild areas and wildlife, are much less familiar with their local natural history, and spend much more time focused on indoor activities. Without an appreciation of our natural heritage, new generations may not see the value of protecting it. Therefore, it is important that some of this education be provided through the formal school system.
3. Since our habits and lifestyle choices as individuals have an enormous cumulative environmental impact, it is critical that good habits be encouraged early on in areas such as energy and water conservation, pollution prevention and protection of biodiversity. There are many

indications that our current consumption patterns are leading to environmental degradation. Thus, if Ontario's children simply adopt the habit of their parents, the degradation is bound to continue.

4. Ministries are implementing an increasing number of environmental monitoring programs that rely on volunteers and volunteer groups to collect and report data on parameters as diverse as cottage lake water quality and bird and amphibian populations. In a similar trend, in April 2001, MOE [Ontario Ministry of the Environment] established a pollution hotline to collect tips from the public on pollution problems. All these approaches rely on a public that is educated on environmental matters.
5. In the past five years, the Ministry of Education has assumed a stronger role in curriculum development, partly because the ministry's Education, Quality and Accountability office administers standardized testing of children at several grade levels. Therefore, the ministry has taken on a more direct responsibility for curriculum content and delivery, including environmental curriculum.

If the Ministry of Education were prescribed under the EBR, there would be improved transparency on how the ministry is furthering environmental education in Ontario. For example, the public would have the right to request improvements to the ministry's approach to environmental curriculum. The public might also want to ask for monitoring and reporting on how effectively schools are teaching existing environmental components of the curriculum. Such requests from the public, as well as the ministry's responses, would be reviewed in the ECO's [Environmental Commissioner of Ontario] annual report to the Ontario legislature and to the public. Unfortunately, there is currently no transparent mechanism to hold the Ministry of Education responsible for environmental education.

Ann Jarnet and Geneviève Marquis: Environment Canada

Excerpt from Environment Canada (2001) report, What We Heard: A Report on the 2000–2001 National Consultation on Environmental Education and Sustainability.

There is abundant evidence that education that engages the learner and provides hands-on experience is more effective and results in deeper learning. Much of environmental education (e.g., ecological monitoring programs) is already designed in this way, but more needs to be done to increase the experiential component of environmental education programs. . . .

Environmental education must inspire a sense of wonder and awe with respect to what is close by (our communities) and what is further away and larger than where we are.

Rachel Carson, Scientist, Environmentalist, Author

Excerpt taken from Carson, R. (1990). The sense of wonder (p. 31). Berkeley, CA: The Nature Company Classics.

It is not half so important to know as to feel. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the sense are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. . . . Once the emotions are aroused — a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love — then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response.

Tom Horton, Poet

Excerpt taken from Horton, T. (1992). Living on the edge [Film]. (Produced by Chesapeake Bay Foundation, 162 Prince George Street, Annapolis, MD, USA 21401).

We don't need a scientific breakthrough to tell us what to do. It's simply a matter of awe, of letting yourself stand in awe of it. And then the respect for how it's all connected and then working to curb our own wasteful ways.

Barbara McKean: Outdoor Educator and Longtime COEO member

Barb McKean is the Manager of Education at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Hamilton. She is also a former Pathways editorial board member.

The following letter to the editor was written in response to Mike Morris' article, "The Death of Outdoor Education." Published Tuesday October 23, 2001. Reprinted with permission from the Hamilton Spectator, 2001 October 23, p. A12.

Ontario's children are being slowly and systematically distanced from the natural world and the things that sustain their lives. In order to know and value something, it is critical to experience that thing first-hand. As outdoor education funding disappears, it seems that a larger and larger segment of our population is going to grow up without ever having an opportunity to experience nature first-hand. If this is the case, how will our society ever be capable of making decisions that don't compromise our own health and the future of our children?

A rapidly growing segment of Canadian society is new to this country. Most live in the inner city, in apartments surrounded by a sea of asphalt, and often in low-income situations. Many families have come from circumstances where basic needs are hard to meet, and so a conservation ethic may have been a luxury they couldn't afford. For many new Canadian children, school-run nature "immersion" experiences are the only opportunities they will ever have to encounter our country's natural environment, overcome their intimidation, and experience that aspect of being Canadian. As the future electorate develops, how do we ensure that the air, water, soil and living things that are the very source and sustenance of our life are recognized, understood, cared for and left intact as a viable legacy for future generations? The answer is to take kids outdoors, and facilitate their connection with nature.

Proponents of the move 'back to basics' may feel that outdoor education is a frill — that exploring forest and marsh is just play, and that CD-ROMs, the Discovery Channel, and nature websites are a more cost-effective way to

meet the same educational outcomes. This underestimates the power of first-hand experience. Immersion in the outdoors, in experiences led by skilful outdoor educators, creates the opportunity for connection. Awareness and connection arouse curiosity, the desire to know more and the wish to understand. With this knowledge and understanding comes the desire to protect and to be a good environmental steward. Simple outdoor experiences for schoolchildren help lay the groundwork for an electorate that cares, that makes decisions based on principles of sustainability — decisions that don't mortgage our grandchildren's future to meet our own short-term needs.

In the early 1900s, each Ontario teacher had a provincial nature study curriculum to deliver — that at a time when most children lived a stone's throw away from the real thing. Now, when we've all but removed most Canadian kids from the natural environment, and when we know how badly they need connection to real things rather than computers, videos and television, outdoor education funding is disappearing. Do as Mike Morris suggested in his article, and call your MPP, write the Minister of Education, and pay close attention to what is happening to outdoor education funding within your own school board. And most of all, take your kids outdoors.

Relevant Articles in Other Recent Publications

Acton, K. (2001, September 3). It's not easy being green. *Macleans*, 114 (3), 6.

Karen is a science department head at a Kitchener high school. She speaks of how motivated her students have become as a result of environmental science and outdoor education experiences.

Morris, M. (2001) The death of outdoor education. *Seasons*, 41 (3), 46.

COEO's own Mike Morris laments the current political and fiscal reality for outdoor education in Ontario. He makes it clear that the difficulties lie with the provincial government, not funding-strapped local school boards.

Canada's Natural Legacy

by Peter Milliken

When *Pathways* approached me recently to ask if I would be interested in contributing an article on my outdoor experiences, I was most happy to oblige. Like many Canadians, I feel a strong attachment to this land; everywhere we look there are natural wonders of which we partake. The seaside, the mountains, the great forests are ours for the savouring, and I consider it a pleasure and a privilege to be so ideally placed to enjoy the Canadian wilderness. I am therefore delighted to share some of my experiences in the great outdoors.

For several generations, my family has had a summer cottage on a small lake near Renfrew, Ontario. I began staying there in my first year, so I can write in all truthfulness that I have loved and enjoyed the Canadian outdoors all my life.

When I was a child, my parents and I, along with numbers of assorted relatives, would go up to the cottage every year, spending as much of the summer there as possible. On occasion, the entire family would row up the lake to some beautiful spot where we would spend the day and enjoy a leisurely picnic and the idyllic surroundings.

“COEO helps Canadians understand the importance of appreciating and caring for our natural resources, not only for ourselves, but so that future generations can continue to learn from and enjoy the many wonders of our great outdoors.”

Although canoes have always been a part of my life, it was not until I was 10 or 11 years old that I began to stern them myself. I have fond memories of learning to canoe — my great aunt and grandmother were my teachers, and they imparted to me a love for the activity. Not content with merely paddling on the tranquil waters of our cottage lake, I began white water canoeing in 1975. Today, I

continue to indulge my enthusiasm for such trips (though my responsibilities prevent me from devoting as much time to them as I once did). I am especially partial to Arctic rivers where the vistas are simply breathtaking and the rapids most challenging.

These extended wilderness trips naturally involve hiking and camping, two other outdoor activities I greatly enjoy. My first overnight hiking trek was at the lake when I was 12 years old, and I remember vividly the excitement of the first night spent in a tent. Although the cottage was only a mile or two away, it still felt like a great adventure, and I found the experience rewarding enough that I have continued to undertake camping trips whenever I have the opportunity.

The outdoors is an inextricable part of our life in Canada; this country is vast and offers unlimited opportunities for outdoor adventures, whether one prefers cross-country skiing, canoeing, hiking or camping. To miss out on these activities is to miss out on something we are uniquely placed to enjoy — many countries are not so privileged.

It is because of our great good fortune that I am so pleased that there are organizations such as the Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario. Composed of people who are interested in teaching quality outdoor education, expanding their personal environmental knowledge, and sharing outdoor experiences with others, COEO helps Canadians understand the importance of appreciating and caring for our natural resources, not only for ourselves, but so that future generations can continue to learn from and enjoy the many wonders of our great outdoors.

Peter Milliken has been the federal MP for the Ontario riding of Kingston (his hometown) and the Islands since 1988. He was elected 34th Speaker of the House of Commons in January 2001. Peter attended Queen's, Oxford and Dalhousie Universities before being called to the bar. He is a keen white water and wilderness canoeist. Rumour has it that he's headed for the Sylvia Grinnell River on Baffin Island next summer.



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