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Hiker's poppy pinned to tree as tribute to forest 'veteran'

The eastern hemlock tree had withstood many storms over two centuries guarding the woods near Exeter, Ontario. Years before Irish immigrants first settled in the area, the tree was there. It kept its post for more than 200 years until a recent storm finally ended its long history.

A passing hiker at Morrison Dam Conservation Area near Exeter seems to have paid a tribute to this veteran of the forest by pinning a poppy to the remains of the tree.

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist Ian Jean discovered the poppy and the tree while walking the South Huron Trail on a recent weekend stroll. Here is how the ABCA employee described coming across the poppy, which may have been one person's silent tribute to this 'veteran' of the forest:

"Last evening I decided to take a walk on our Morrison Trail – something I should do more often – and stopped to admire an old hemlock that had recently fallen victim to a strong wind," he recalled in an e-mail to co-workers. "Tony and Wayne (ABCA field staff) had to cut through the tree to clear the trail so, on the fresh-cut wood, I decided to count the rings. The tree had broken



Ian Jean, Forestry and Land Stewardship Specialist with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA), with the 'veteran tree.'

off about 15 feet off of the ground and I counted the 158 tree rings on the upper log, which would have been at least 30 feet tall."

Jean explains how he arrived at his estimate that the tree is at least 200 years old.

"Hemlock grows very slowly and most of the rings were about one millimetre wide. To reach 30 feet of height can take anywhere from 30 to 100 years for a hemlock – so if we add, conservatively, 40 years to that tree I think that we can safely say it was 200 years old."

It is not unusual for an eastern hemlock to reach 200 years of age. In fact, the shade-resistant species can take 300 years to mature, can reproduce for 450 years and the oldest recorded hemlock is reported to have reached almost 1,000 years of age.

"Fittingly, someone has pinned a poppy on the bark of this fallen veteran of the forest," Jean said. "Perhaps they had stopped and counted the rings as well."

The poppy remains a powerful and enduring symbol of remembrance of the ultimate sacrifices made by our soldiers in the protection of our values, sovereignty and freedom. Perhaps the hiker who left the poppy on this tree felt it was also an appropriate symbol to remember a veteran of another kind.

"Maybe the hiker noticed this ancient tree and made a special trip back to place the poppy on it to remember it," Jean said.

First Trails Open event held in July

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) hosted its first 'Trails Open Ontario' event in 2009.

Trails Open Ontario is a partnership with Ontario Heritage Trust and Conservation Ontario. Conservation Authorities are hosting a number of special events on hiking trails in Conservation Areas across the province until the end of October. For more information, visit Ontario Heritage Trust at www.heritagefdn.on.ca or visit www.ontarioconservationareas.ca

The ABCA event was held on Saturday, July 4 and included guided hikes, an angling demonstration and a visit to a wetlands site. The event received front-page newspaper coverage and participants said they enjoyed the guided hikes conducted by staff.

Trails Open was held locally in partnership with the Annual Demo Day, hosted by Exi-Plast Custom Moulding Ltd., which draws streams of people for canoe and kayak demonstrations, family fishing, displays and a barbecue.

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Visitors to travel back in time at noted world fossil site

H. G. Wells wrote about going back in time in *The Time Machine*.

Active seniors, and other interested adults, have the opportunity to do just that during an event at one of the world's noted fossil sites, Rock Glen Conservation Area near Arkona.

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) is hosting 'Rock Glen Time Travel: Fossils and Local History' as part of its walk-and-talk series of events. The event takes place on **Tuesday, August 11** from 10:00 a.m. until noon at Rock Glen Conservation Area, near Arkona, site of the gorgeous Rock Glen Falls and the world-renowned Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre.

Active local seniors and tourists have the opportunity to experience one of the world's renowned fossil sites and see a scenic area waterfall during a nature walk-and-talk that is part of a series open to anyone but is especially designed for active seniors.

"Archaeologists and paleontologists have been travelling to Rock Glen and surrounding area to view unique fossils for decades," said Julie Hicks, ABCA Conservation Education Specialist.



Participants in the ABCA's Walk and Talk series have enjoyed learning about their natural surroundings. Anyone can attend the events but they are aimed at reaching active seniors. The next opportunity takes place on August 11. If you are interested in this or other Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority programming you are invited to visit abca.on.ca or phone us at the numbers in this article.

Rock Glen Conservation Area is located at 8680 Rock Glen Road, Arkona, Ontario, just two kilometres northeast of the village of Arkona (40 minutes west of London and east of Sarnia). The gatehouse phone number is **519-828-3071**.

"This is a great way for active seniors to come out to learn a little more about fossils and to share stories with one another," said Hicks. Anyone is welcome to attend the event. Interested people can join ABCA staff at the Arkona Lions Museum and Information

Centre at Rock Glen. Participants are encouraged to bring a hat, a bottle of water, and hiking shoes, as they will be taking the stairs down into the Gorge in the Conservation Area. The cost is \$5 per person and beverages will be available afterwards (please bring your own mug).

For more information on the Seniors Walk-and-talk events, phone Julie or Denise at **519-235-2610** or **1-888-286-2610**, e-mail jhicks@abca.on.ca or dbiega@abca.on.ca or visit www.abca.on.ca

'Wilderness Wednesdays' day camps run to August 26

Are you looking for engaging activities for your children during summer?

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) has been providing parents and guardians with a fun and educational summer activity for children ages 5–10.

Seven one-day Nature Day Camps are being held throughout the summer at the Morrison Dam Conservation Area (just two kilometres east of Exeter).

Nature Day Camps started on Wednesday, July 15 and will run on every Wednesday until August 26. Day camps are being run from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and staff are available from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. for early drop-off and late pick-up.

Each day is filled with loads of activities including games, hikes and experiments; with a focus on experience and exploration in a natural environment.



'Wilderness Wednesdays' summer nature day camps run until August 26.

"It's our goal to reconnect youth to nature by providing hands-on educational experiences and dynamic programming," said Denise Biega, ABCA Conservation Education Technician.

All registered children will get a 'Wilderness Passport' and for each camp the child attends, they will receive a stamp on that day's spot. Children with four or more stamps on their 'Wilderness Passport' are eligible for a fantastic wilderness prize.

Any child with a full 'Wilderness Passport' (attending all seven day

camps) will receive a special gift.

The cost of one day of Nature Day Camp is \$35 (lunch not included). Register your child for more than one day and receive a discount. Cost is \$65 per child for two days, \$95 per child for three days and if you register your child for four or more days the cost is \$30 per child per day.

Space is limited, so get your registration forms into the ABCA office as soon as possible.

"Pack a litterless lunch, two snacks, water bottle, sun screen and bug spray for a great fun-filled day," said Biega.

Registration forms can be picked up at the ABCA office at Morrison Dam Conservation Area during regular business hours or downloaded from the ABCA website at abca.on.ca

For more information, please call the ABCA head office Monday–Friday 8:30a.m. – 4:30 p.m. at **519-235-2610** or toll-free **1-888-286-2610**.

Community working group members complete training, present planning policy suggests to region's committee

More than 75 members of the public in the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley areas have successfully completed a 15-module technical training program on drinking water source protection.

Members of six local working groups, and a municipal sub committee, ended their year and a half of study this year. They then applied the knowledge they had acquired to the development of planning policy suggestions which they presented to the Source Protection Committee (SPC) on Tuesday, June 23. A thank-you barbecue was held that day to recognize the work and commitment shown by these community volunteers.

The in-depth training program for members of the public is unique in the Province of Ontario. Technical and sector-based working groups exist in other parts of the province but the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley region developed a multi-stakeholder model of participation and a detailed program of study with the help of experts in the adult education field. This extensive program has enabled a wide cross-section of community members to acquire detailed technical knowledge



which supports their active involvement in the planning process.

The volunteers have met at least once every two months since February of 2008 and completed ten three-hour sessions to acquire technical knowledge related to drinking water source protection. They have also taken part in tours of municipal wells and intakes, sinkholes and attended a water conference called 'Backyard Briefs.'

The working group members provided policy suggestions to deal with 21 different kinds of threats to drinking water sources. The working groups' recommendations to the Source Protection Committee are available online at sourcewaterinfo.on.ca

Working group members who have completed the adult learning program are eligible to register with Fleming College to pursue a Statement of Recognition. The accredited recognition will be granted to those registrants who successfully complete a formal



Parkhill-area drinking water source protection community working group members John Peters and Donna Ferguson present policy suggestions for consideration of the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Source Protection Committee.

assessment of their applied knowledge gained through the 2008-2009 year of study.

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Science journalist praises community's water protection efforts

An estimated 220 people converged in the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Drinking Water Source Protection Region on Tuesday, June 23 to hear one of Canada's foremost science journalists and broadcasters speak on water issues, climate change and the need for alternative energy sources.

The Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Drinking Water Source Protection Region invited Bob McDonald, host of CBC radio's *Quirks and Quarks* and TV Ontario's *Heads Up!*, to speak to the public on water protection.

There is no other known world that can support human life, according to McDonald. "It's very beautiful, it's exquisite, it's unique," he told the crowd at the Columbus Centre in Goderich, in the Maitland Valley Source Protection Area. The well-known author compared the Earth to the 'Garden of Eden' but he said it's a



Award-winning radio and television host, and author, Bob McDonald came to the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley Source Protection Region to speak on the need to protect water and air on our planet.

very fragile planet too. "A (planet with a) thin film of water, a thin bubble of air – that's where we live."

He said the planet may look, from afar, like it is blue and has lots of water but he used a pitcher and a glass – removing the undrinkable water until only a drop was left – to illustrate that very little of the world's water is fit for drinking. "Only 0.1 per cent of all the water in the world is available for us to drink," he said.

McDonald complimented the people of this region for their active local involvement in protecting the fragile sources of drinking water. He said Canada has so much of the world's scarce fresh water supplies that "we are the water keepers."

The speaker made it clear there is no doubt the planet's climate is changing. "Yes, the Earth is getting warmer," he said. The problem is not just that the planet is getting warmer, he said, but that the planet is getting hotter at an unprecedented rate.

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University of Waterloo student working to protect species at risk

A University of Waterloo co-op student has returned for a second work term as Stewardship Specialist Assistant with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) and this year he is focusing his efforts on protecting species at risk.

Student Mark Funk, of Jordan, Ontario, has resumed his work helping develop a terrestrial species at risk (SAR) inventory as part of the Ecological Land Classification (ELC) project that the ABCA began last fall on some of its more diverse lands. He is also commencing work with ABCA aquatic biologist Kari Jean. Funk has sampled sections of the Lower Ausable River and the Old Ausable Channel for aquatic species at risk, such as Grass Pickerel and Lake Chubsucker.

The inventory work Mark has undertaken in the Old Ausable Channel will help locate and protect three fish species at risk in the Grand Bend coastal area. He will also be assisting with a community conservation project in the Port Franks coastal area.

“Returning to the ABCA has been a rewarding experience with a host of new challenges and opportunities,” he said. “I’m enjoying the diversity of aquatic and terrestrial conservation work and I’m really gratified to be able to expand on some of the work I started last year.”

The student in the Environment and Resource Studies program at University of Waterloo has concentrated on species at risk work, studying their potential threats, habitat and stewardship strategies, but his wide-ranging work also includes forest management and the collection and analysis of biological and water quality



University of Waterloo student Mark Funk is helping to protect species at risk through his work term at the ABCA – thanks to a partnership between the Carolinian Canada Coalition, the university and the Conservation Authority.

data.

The student’s work has included tree and vegetation surveys in Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI) in the Carolinian Canada section of the watershed, as well as documentation of rare or protected species. Through the Ecological Land Classification project, Mark has assisted the ABCA in locating and identifying many species at risk along the Ausable Gorge ANSI and potential threats.

In addition to the terrestrial lands inventory, Mark has assisted with an aquatic inventory as part of the Ausable River Recovery Strategy (ARRS).

At the ABCA, Mark has acquired valuable experience with ecosystem restoration and

management and has developed many important field skills. He has assisted with the Conservation Authority’s spring tree planting program through site visits, planning and tree planting. From this he has gained a practical understanding of ecological restoration.

“There is no shortage of interesting and important projects where I can use and develop the skills I have learned in my university program,” he said. “I am very fortunate to be able to learn from professionals working in the field and help to make a positive environmental difference at the same time.”

During May, Mark completed his Class 2 Electrofishing Certification and has finished most of the required field training while searching for Black Redhorse, a species at risk in the Ausable River. He has also been involved occasionally with provincial water quality data collection, as well as ABCA and private forest management activities.

A partnership of the Carolinian Canada Coalition and University of Waterloo has subsidized Mark’s two co-op terms at the ABCA. Returning for a second internship at the ABCA has provided Mark with many unique experiences, and has allowed him to further build his knowledge, skills and understanding of species at risk and conservation.

“This may be my second year at ABCA but the diversity of work here means there is a new challenge every week,” he said. “The skills I am acquiring will provide direct benefits to my career as I enter the environmental field upon graduation.”

Public involvement in region praised by speakers

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The speaker’s visuals, showing the accelerated decline in northern sea ice, painted a stark picture for the audience. The anticipated melting of permafrost is likely to release methane and pose a greenhouse gas impact ten times more severe than carbon dioxide, he said.

The noted science journalist underscored the fragility of the planet but he also offered a message of hope. “Look how far we have come, look what we have done, I think we can apply the same creativity and the same ingenuity and figure out how to get through this (and find) new ways to turn wheels, other ways to keep ourselves warm, other ways to move from here to there,”

he said. “We’ve got to take care of this beautiful (planet) because that’s all there is.”

Goderich Councillor David Yates introduced McDonald to the crowd. He also complimented the region on its “truly unique” efforts to include members of the public in local, community Source Protection working groups. The more than 75 community working group members have just completed a year and a half of study of water protection through an adult learning program and they presented planning policy suggestions to the Source Protection Committee. They will also be invited to provide feedback on the assessment reports being prepared in the upcoming year.

Community involved

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Working group members have finished their learning program but will be invited back on an ad hoc basis to provide feedback on assessment reports being prepared this year. Working groups were located in the areas of Clinton, Listowel, Wingham, Parkhill, Exeter and Kingsbridge. The municipal sub committee had municipal representatives from throughout the region.

The in-depth training program for community working groups was created with financial support of the Province of Ontario through the Source Protection Planning initiative under the *Clean Water Act, 2006*.