

CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF BONNECHERE PARKS

FALL 2000

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We've all heard the old adage: necessity is the mother of invention. At Bonnechere Park this past summer, it was mother nature who reaffirmed the need for ongoing fund raising and innovation. For the past several years we've hosted most of our gatherings and workshops outdoors – beneath a vinyl tarp against the east wall of the former bookstore and under the shelter of the tall pines. As the cool, wet weather of fall came on we would hang vinyl walls all round to provide further protection.

But we always looked upon this as a temporary solution. We needed a gathering place which would provide a solid roof over our heads to keep out the sun, cold and rain, a bigger space for our Ontario Parks Store, and suitable offices for the Friends and staff. Last July, with the opening of our Davenport Cultural Resource Centre we got all that and more – and not a minute too soon!

As we prepared to welcome over 150 dignitaries and guests to our opening celebration, a ferocious east wind blew in from the lake and the skies opened up. The rain came pelting down so hard that we could hardly hear our voices under the steel roof and still-open rafters of the Grand Hall! But we were all inside – warm and dry.

A half-hour later as our ceremony began, the storm had moved on and we were able to celebrate in comfort. And what a wonderful celebration it was. People filled the Grand Hall and spilled into Fraser Foyer. And after the speeches, it was the rhythmic sound of traditional step-dancers on the new pine stage that rang through the building and up into the rafters.

This was a first big step towards creating a multi-purpose gathering place at Bonnechere Park. It's meant years of fund raising and the generous support of Ontario Parks, local contractors, building suppliers, volunteers and donors. We thank one and all, and look forward to sharing many wonderful times within these walls.

Betty Biesenthal, Editor

DAVENPORT CULTURAL HERITAGE CENTRE A Grand Opening

On July 15, 2000, after seven years of planning, fund raising and a lot of hard work, Park Superintendent Jim Fraser and the FBP realized a dream with the official opening of the Davenport Cultural Resources Centre. Named after long-time campers **Harold and Evelyn Davenport** who have been coming to the Park for over 35 years, the Centre includes an expanded Ontario Parks Store, Grand Hall, office space, outdoor amphitheatre and, at the entrance, the Fraser Foyer which will be developed to include permanent exhibits.



THE FINAL CUT: Director Ross Taylor, Assistant Park Superintendent Brent Fredricks, Park Superintendent Jim Fraser, President Laurie Fraser, and Director Dennis Gorr at the grand opening of the Davenport Cultural Resource Centre.

Specifically planned to coincide with National Parks Day, our celebrations kicked off with remarks by FBP President Laurie Fraser and invited dignitaries including Deputy-Reeve O'Reilly and MP Hec Clouthier. Then with great fanfare and in period costume, FBP Directors Ross Taylor and Dennis Gorr plied a traditional cross-cut saw through a white pine log, much to the amusement of our guests – particularly the younger set.

To mark the Park's 33rd Anniversary and the new millennium, a time capsule was prepared with the help of Friends and guests including former staff **Jim Gauthier**, who was Park Superintendent at Bonnechere in the late 1970s. The capsule containing 33 packets of memorabilia will be buried in a cairn to be erected at the entrance to the Davenport Centre.

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OAS - Ottawa Chapter Recipient of 2000 Board of Directors Award



Since its inception, the FBP has developed strong relationships with several like-minded people and organizations who share in our vision to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Little Bonnechere. One of our most willing and capable partners in this quest has been the OAS - Ottawa Chapter, recipients of the 2000 FBP Board of Directors Award.

Over the years, this dedicated group of volunteers has helped us rediscover our identity by teaching us how to dig into the past — literally! They have worked with us to co-host public digs, kids' workshops and interpretive programs for teachers and students. They have taught us about the scientific method of archaeology, conducted test pits, helped us write books, dated our artefacts, and shared in the rush that comes when one uncovers yet another treasure.

Many of you will remember the thrill that came with the discovery of Peggi's saucer — the small plate after which our Board of Directors award is fashioned and named. It's fitting that it was uncovered at what is thought to be the door step of the 'big house' at Basin Depot, for it is this simple plate which represents the foundation of the partnership between the OAS - Ottawa Chapter and the FBP.

AND THE WINNER IS

Congratulations to **Ron and Carrol Dowdall** of Renfrew, Ontario for winning the fall membership draw! This year's prize is a family package for a visit to Bonnechere Caves in Eganville. Have fun down under!

WEBSITE RENOVATIONS

We are currently revamping our website and should be live with the new version by January 1. In the mean time check us out at www.bonnecherepark.on.ca

Afterwards, the Friends served birthday cake to over 150 guests, then sat back to enjoy the traditional fiddling and stepdancing of **Lana and Angela O'Grady and friends**.

Over the past summer, the Davenport Centre was the focal point for several annual events and special activities: the Friends Festival, our AGM, Dig-Pig-n-Jig 2000, bi-weekly Artist-in-Residence workshops, Kids' Camps and family programs.

Already, there is great interest in using the Centre year round for interpretive activities [and sleepovers] — particularly from September through May. In order to accommodate this new programming, plans are well under way for fund raising towards further development of the Davenport Centre. Phase II will include indoor washrooms, a kitchen, proper lighting, seating and sound systems for the Grand Hall and outdoor amphitheatre, exhibit development, and finish carpentry.

Once again, we are asking for support towards the completion of this project. In exchange for tax receipts and public recognition, the FBP are requesting help in acquiring the following:

- theatre seating, lighting and sound systems
- secure storage and file systems
- computer work stations [hardware & software]
- sponsored interpretive exhibits

Parks Buys the Lafleur Homestead

Those of you who are acquainted with Basin Depot will know that it was a bustling logging settlement at the end of the 19th Century before the property was reclaimed by the Crown towards the development of Algonquin Park. Included in this tiny community was a cluster of farms spread out over a 46km stretch along the shores of the Little Bonnechere River.

A century later, one of the few farms of this era that remains relatively intact, is the Lafleur homestead on Currier's Lake. This roughly flat parcel of land bounded to the west and north by the Little Bonnechere River contains a store of cultural heritage riches within its humble collection of buildings: a 2-storey log home, barn, piggery, creamery, root cellar and outhouse. What it contains in hidden heritage is yet to be discovered!



Recently, the property was put up for sale by its private owner and Park staff and the FBP, realizing the importance of the site for preservation and possible future interpretation, lobbied Ontario Parks for support in purchasing it. Despite recent fiscal restraints, permission to purchase the Lafleur property was granted.

The Lafleur homestead has changed ownership several times over its life span. Historic census records show that Francis Currier had a stopping place and farm here, in the White Mountain Narrows, when the Township of Burns was surveyed in 1874. Currier was the only settler in the Township at the time, but it is not known when he arrived. The Curriers still lived here at the time of the 1881 Census, but from 1890 to 1895 the farm became the home of Thomas Walker and family who also maintained a stopping place for travellers along the Old Bonnechere Road.

It is estimated that by 1904 the Currier's Lake farm was occupied by Charles Lafleur and his family, who moved here from a site on nearby Lafleur Lake. The farm remained a gathering place for the people living in and travelling to the Basin Depot settlement, and records of the time show that once every two months the local Roman Catholic priest would travel to this remote settlement to say mass at the Lafleur homestead.

Since funding for restorations is limited, the importance of strategic planning for the future of Lafleur homestead is vital. As a preliminary step, the Park asked the **Architectural Conservancy of Ontario [ACO]** to conduct an assessment of the property. This report, provided on a voluntary basis, is the first step towards the preservation of this important part of Ontario's heritage.

Results contained in the ACO report are indeed encouraging. "This site is remarkable in that the buildings have seen only modest alterations. There is sufficient information available to permit a credible restoration to a period which encompasses all of the structures on-site."

In conclusion, the report advises in-depth research by an archaeologist, structural engineer, and building conservation specialist, and the development of a master plan for restoration based on available resources.

The FBP are excited about the future of the Lafleur homestead and are currently investigating funding opportunities towards developing and implementing a master plan.

The walls of these weathered buildings, the land on which they've stood for over 100 years, and the historic river that flows past, all have many stories to tell. It is the goal of the FBP to bring these stories to life while preserving the cultural heritage riches of this humble homestead.



Hardwood Jack MacDonald and his family at the front door of the main house of the MacDonald homestead; circa 1914. The MacDonald and Lafleur homesteads were very similar.

A New Park for the Bonnechere?

Back in 1975, the Ministry of Natural Resources, Division of Parks, hired botanist Rysa Showkewych-Hanna and geologist Constance Spek to survey the vegetation, habitats, rocks and landforms of the **Bonnechere study area**. This included the Foy Property, Bonnechere Park and the Little Bonnechere River up to Basin Depot. Since then, for a variety of reasons, three wonderful parks have been created out of this landscape. And we are 'Friends' of them all.

Twenty-five years later, Ontario Parks is beginning a process that could bring these three parks together again, to better manage and protect their resources and to create opportunities for interpretation, marketing and cultural heritage tourism. The window of opportunity is created by a policy of the Ontario government: a commitment to create and review management plans for all Ontario provincial parks. Bonnechere's time has come.

For the record: Bonnechere is a 162ha Recreation Class Provincial Park that was officially regulated in 1967. Foy Provincial Park is a 148ha Recreation Class Park that was regulated in 1985. Management Plans for both parks were approved in 1986 and have not been reviewed since then. Bonnechere River Provincial Park is an 1198ha Waterway Class Park that was regulated in 1986. It does not have a management plan or even an interim management statement [a document that gives guidance on sustaining park resources in the absence of a management plan].

Recently the 39ha Stringer,s Lake wetland [an Ontario's Living Legacy site] and the historically and archaeologically significant 22ha Lafleur homestead were added to the park land base. The combined park area is now about 1508ha. However, Bonnechere is the only operating park. Under the management of Jim Fraser and his staff, Bonnechere has provided quality camping and day-use experiences as well as new roofed accommodations alias rustic cabins] that have diversified the Park's clientele and helped extend its operating season. Foy Provincial Park and Bonnechere River Provincial Park are both non-operating parks that are under the custodial management of Bonnechere Park staff.

A **management planning program** is about to begin that could bring these naturally and historically connected parks under one umbrella: the proposed name is the **Little Bonnechere River Provincial Park**. The proposed amalgamation would help ensure efficient management, while fostering protection of Park values and providing a better focus for marketing, interpretation and development opportunities. The end result should be more sustainably managed park land, greater opportunities for park visitors and a higher profile for the region in the growing outdoor tourism market.

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WORK CONTINUES ON INTERACTIVE CD

Exploring Our Hidden Heritage Basin Depot and Lafleur Homestead

In the last issue I spoke of our plan to use high tech innovation to recreate the history of settlement along the Little Bonnechere for today's visitors. *Exploring Our Hidden Heritage* will allow modern-day travellers to journey back in time by popping a CD into their personal computer and taking an electronic tour of the historic sites at the Lafleur homestead and Basin Depot.

Maps and a timeline will guide the traveller to their choice of destination and era, where they will point-and-click their way through a maze of historic and contemporary photography [including a 360° panorama of some vistas], a catalogue of recovered artefacts, early survey documents and audio clips of the Little Bonnechere River settlers.

For those who want to take the tour in real time, the CD will be come with a self-guided handbook which will guide hikers through this hidden heritage on-site.

While there is still a great deal to accomplish before an early-summer 2001 launch, work on the project is well under way. With the help of **Ted Hiscock**, MNR Pembroke, we have conducted photography of the sites for electronic manipulation. We've started to conduct, sorting through photos, maps, documents and audio tapes. We've also have asked **Susan Code**, Heritage Entrepreneur and author, to write a script which will bring the pictures and stories to life. Those of you who were lucky enough to attend Susan's session at last fall's Cultural Heritage Tourism Conference, will know how enthralling she can be!

Exploring Our Hidden Heritage, whether one travels via mouse pad or on foot, will provide a concise and entertaining modern-day guide to the people and stories that time has left behind along the Little Bonnechere River.

A **Planning Team** is being created for the Little Bonnechere River Provincial Park Management Plan, and a representative of the Friends of Bonnechere Parks is being asked to participate as a full member. The planning process is only in its preliminary stage, which involves the creation of **Terms of Reference** [a guidebook for the development of the management plan]. Readers can expect to hear much more about the management plan in the months ahead. More to the point, the Planning Team will be looking forward to hearing from you about your thoughts on the future management of the park lands. As a Park user, and a Friend, you have much to contribute.

If you would like more information about the management planning process, or have some background information you would like to contribute, please contact Mark Stabb, Park Planner or Jim Fraser, Park Superintendent at Bonnechere Provincial Park, RR5, Killaloe ON K0J 2A0 613-757-2103.

Submitted by Mark Stabb, Park Planner, Bonnechere Provincial Park

Winterberry Bend

Fall along the Bonnechere River can be a quiet, subdued time. Most boaters have left, cottagers have closed up camp and the river is left to the beaver, moose and migrating ducks. A trip along the river, especially if taken during a mild fall like we had this year, can yield many pleasant surprises. One outstanding phenomenon is the vibrant profusion of berries of winterberry holly.

Winterberry holly [*Ilex verticillata*] is a 3-4 metre tall shrub that grows in damp thickets and wetlands and rings the edges of rivers, ponds and lakes. It has rather nondescript deciduous leaves; they are not evergreen like most hollies. When these leaves fall — and even before they drop — the plant produces a magnificent display of bright pea-sized berries. Red as a cardinal flower, which also grows along the river, the berries create a crimson halo along the shores of Bonnechere River Provincial Park.

During a boat trip with Jim Fraser and Park staff Brent Frederick and Vern Eno on October 19 and 20 we saw a tremendous winterberry display around Couchain Lake, McGuire's Island, Beaverdam Lake and several other locations. Another great 'berry patch' was found along the large wetland at the big bend of the Bonnechere River below Enos Bay and upstream of Turner's Camp. Most of the 40ha significant [and privately-owned] wetland around this bend remains out of sight of paddlers, but the edge is alive with winterberry and other interesting wetland species.

Migrating songbirds did not miss the abundance of berries. We saw many flocks of American Robins feasting on the berries, along with White-throated Sparrows, Red-winged Blackbirds and the occasional Blue Jay. It is quite likely that some of the the Mallards, Black Ducks and Wood Ducks that we saw along the river also scooped up a few berries from the water's edge.

The excellent reference book, *Forest Plants of Central Ontario*, reports that many other birds enjoy the berries, as do black bear and white-tailed deer. No doubt the deer snack on riverside berries enroute to Round Lake from Algonquin Park each winter. According to the book, humans have apparently enjoyed the berries as well: "Historically, its bark, berries, buds and wood were used in medicine, and its leaves were steeped for tea." [The book's authors, and this writer, caution against trying out the plant unless you do further research.]

I took many photos of the winterberry shrubs on that trip. Photographing them was easy; the berries were right at eye and shoulder level. Come to think of it, maybe this is what Jim Fraser means when he talks about the shoulder season for tourism in the area. Hmm — berry interesting!

Submitted by Mark Stabb

Call for Artefacts

Desperately seeking forgotten treasures: artefacts, tools, mementoes, writings, stories from Basin Depot, Lafleur Homestead and Omanique's Mill. Will borrow temporarily or provide a safe, permanent home. Tax receipts provided. Call Jim Fraser: 613-757-2103.

A Class Act: *Discover the Spirits* Goes to School!

Lisanne Lasalle, Grade 5 teacher at Eganville District Public School, has purchased a class set of *Discover the Spirits: A Cultural Heritage Activity Book for Youth*, published by the FBP in 1998. Based on **Rory Mackay's** *Spirits of the Little Bonnechere*, and designed to appeal to children 8 to 15, the activity book tells the story of discovery, settlement and logging along the Little Bonnechere in the early 1900s, and the history of the First Nations, explorers and fur traders who came before the European pioneers. The book also explains the scientific method of archaeology for exploring the past, and teaches the importance of preservation of our natural and historic resources to those who will come after us. Congratulations class!

Belated Thanks

At the opening celebrations of the Davenport Centre we tried to thank everyone who had helped along the way, but there is one important friend of the Friends that we forgot to recognize. Over the past two winters **Fred Blackstein** has hosted the Wilderness Skills course in Pembroke, donating his time and all registration fees directly to the Cultural Resource Centre Project. This money was used to pay for electrical work, some of the carpentry and the beautiful hand-carved signs throughout the building. Fred, we couldn't have done it without you. Many, many thanks!

Good-bye Pat

Recently, after almost 30 years of working with the Friends of Algonquin, **Pat Tozer** joined her husband Ron in retirement. Pat was always a big supporter of the FBP. We couldn't have published *Spirits of the Little Bonnechere* without her support, and she was always the one we would call when we needed a partner on one our projects. She listened, she lobbied and she helped. We miss her already. Pat — enjoy your retirement!