

News & Views

August 2016

Mississippi Madawaska Land Trust
Preserving the land  Protecting the future



YOUTH CLUBS EXPLORE NATURE

Even if you grew up in the city, you probably have memories of a forested area along a creek or in a ravine where you could make a fort and play hide and seek with friends. You could spend hours lost in your imagination, making believe you were Peter Pan's lost boys or Tarzan and Jane. Back in those days we had much more freedom to run wild and explore nature, only returning home in time for dinner.

Today children spend most of their time indoors. Any outdoor activities are usually highly organized and structured, under close adult supervision. Parents are much more concerned about child predators or drug pushers having access to their unsupervised children.

MMLT believes that exposure to wilderness is healing to our whole being. The freedom to roam freely in nature brings out the wild child in all of us. To this end, we are launching a **Wild Child Initiative** to help guide our activities and events throughout the next few years. This summer we have several planned events.

Earlier this year we received a grant from the Perth & District Community Foundation to organize youth outings at two of our properties. Children from area youth clubs will have several opportunities to explore Blueberry Mountain and High Lonesome Nature Reserve. While there are facilitators to guide the activities, the children are encouraged to explore nature freely. Thanks to this grant, bus transportation costs are covered which is a barrier for such organizations. Rideau Ground Search & Rescue are offering assistance by providing the [AdventureSmart Program](#) to these children to teach them how to be safe in the wilderness.



A **WILD CHILD** Initiative

WIN A VACATION IN NATURE IN OUR GO WILD RAFFLE



To help MMLT fulfill its responsibilities for stewarding the properties under its care, we are holding a Go Wild Raffle throughout the late summer and fall of 2016. We are offering 3 vacation packages as prizes.

First prize is a 1 week vacation for 2 people at 'The Rapids', a private cottage at Palmerston Highlands, an island in the middle of the Mississippi River surrounded by rapids and waterfalls. Second prize is 2 nights for 2 people at the Calabogie Peaks Hotel with breakfasts, unlimited golf and hiking on Calabogie Mountain trails. Third prize is 1 night for 2 people at Fairwinds B&B in Pakenham with breakfast, pack lunch, beer tasting at Cartwright Springs Brewery, plus a guided hike at High Lonesome Nature Reserve.

Tickets are \$20 each or 3 tickets for \$50 and may be purchased from any MMLT board member or staff or at a various outlets. The draw will take place at our Go Wild Gala scheduled for the evening of Saturday, November 5th at Temple's Sugar Camp.

FOR GOD'S SAKE, EXPERIENCE AND CHERISH WHAT WE HAVE

by Howard Clifford

The title was inspired by the words of Robert Service: "Have you strung your soul to silence? Then for God's sake go and do it." Yes, go and do it - experience it - don't take our soul-rending wilderness majesty for granted until suddenly we find it gone, irretrievable, lost forever.

A visitor from Toronto stood at the top of Blueberry Mountain surveying hill after hill as far as the eye could see - forests dressed by the riotous colours of autumn. "Oh what a blessed spot!" Another said: "I forgot how intoxicating the air can be!" Similar evocative statements are repeated time and time again from city folk experiencing what we have in Lanark Highlands. I accompanied a Swiss couple to the top of Blueberry. They gazed in silence before stating: "How glorious!" I was taken aback since they live in the Swiss Alps. "Oh yes the Alps are beautiful, but we would see cars winding their way below us and houses everywhere. This is utterly different."

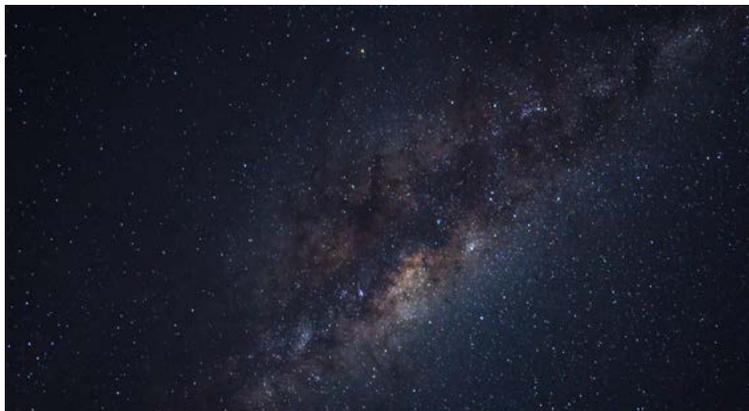
Children say it best. I was most touched by the writing of Rayna Critchly who penned A Little Ray of Heaven recounting a visit to Blueberry Mountain by the Photography Club of the Sacred Heart School in Lanark.

"While the rest of us were left speechless by the view, a fellow student said, "A picture can't begin to show how beautiful it really was! Walking up to the top of the mountain, a silence filled the air. We were all thinking the same thing when suddenly a one syllable word was heard, "Wow!"

HEAVENLY SIGHTS VANISHED

Ralph Waldo Emerson suggested that if the stars only showed themselves once in a 1000 years, they would be declared a miracle of the ages. Would he not, as should we, be reduced to tears at the news that the world has lost their night skies? A staggering 99% of Americans live under polluted skies and 80% of North Americans live where they cannot see the Milky Way.

I once felt smug when visitors from large cities expressed wonder at the awesome splendour of our night skies. No more. I cannot imagine it - it's too painful to contemplate the loss I would feel if these sacred sights were taken from me. Remember those evenings when the stars seemed close enough to pluck from the skies? Can you imagine being unable to introduce these heavenly experiences to your grandchildren? Equally heart-wrenching is to know that grandchildren may not care. They cannot mourn what they have never known.



SACRED SILENCE - NOWHERE

There is no place left where silence reigns supreme. Gordon Hempton found only 12 sites in the continental U.S. having intervals of 15 minutes free from man-made noises. Even national parks and protected wilderness average less than five minutes intervals.

This is scary - a threat to our well-being. People moving into cities initially think they will go nuts from the constant bombardment of sound but in a short period of time state they no longer notice it. Science tells another story. Our physiological systems still register the noise to the detriment of our health. What is happening is what researchers term "learned deafness" a protective measure against all the background noise. Our brain works feverishly to block out the sounds we do not need but in so doing we develop a state of brain fatigue.

I tried unsuccessfully to dispute this nightmarish claim that places of silence, if not already extinct, are endangered. Our family, over a 12 week period, camped in U.S. parks and wilderness areas. We loved the beauty but missed the quiet and solitude we found at home. This trip made me realize how insidiously and quickly the process of nature amnesia overtakes us. Following one typical night when I found that sleep was hard to come by due to the distant sound of highway traffic, one lady said she came there every summer for "the peace and quiet." We stayed overnight at my cousin's home and he remarked he was glad they lived in a quiet neighbourhood. Half-jokingly I said: "Quiet compared to what, living next to an airport?" He laughed; having visited Flower Station he immediately realized our perception of quiet was of a different order.

I began to wonder if I too was suffering from nature amnesia - just how quiet was home? I visited several protected areas within 150 km west of Ottawa. To my surprise none met the 15 minute test. I had previously been oblivious to the background hum of distant highway traffic. Then, with decibel meter in hand, I spent hours on the trails of cliffLAND carefully recording time intervals free from man-made intrusions. Finally I could say this is a place that met the fifteen minute challenge: a sanctuary of silence. The intervals would have been much longer if not for the occasional, usually muffled, sound of aircraft.

We know silence is important. Humans process natural sounds differently. It has a calming effect, bringing inner peace and serenity and has a remarkable restorative effect.

THE OBVIOUS QUESTION IS: "Why are parts of Lanark Highlands blessed with wilderness, pure air, night skies, and sanctuaries of silence rarely found elsewhere?"

Likely dumb luck. Highways 7 and 17 part ways west of Ottawa, one diverting towards Toronto and the other towards Thunder Bay. Lanark Highlands is that lucky space in between - largely untraveled and unknown - a lonely yet precious paradise. It makes us remarkably unique, part of a glorious wilderness concert hall - soul stirring night skies and awesome sanctuaries of silence. Dumb luck - fine! But let us jealously protect and experience the little we have left. In the words of Robert Service: "Then for God's sake go and do it!"

*If you have questions or
would like to be added to our mailing list,
please contact Susan Sentesy,
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