

For Hants Journal – May Rangers report

The Lime Rangers have been enjoying the spring Sunday walks in the Peninsula. We've made regular visits to our favourite Hemlock Ravine. A place where the barred owls have been hooting their welcome, and all our worries fall away. And who has been leaving the little bundles of yellow birch bark tied with a sprig of hemlock or red spruce? We've also noted the presence of a pileated woodpecker, eagles, dragonflies, and various amphibians. The frog pond chorus has been loud and clear, but who is singing in the middle of the day – those long, ascending notes?

This is definitely the time of year to enjoy flowering plants. Earlier in May we were noticing the flowering trees:

*Juniper, hackmatack, tamarak, or larch.
Completely naked from November to March.*

It is now flowering – hot pink! Sweetferns are also flowering crimson, and the old dry leaves from last year carry the unique, fresh smell that reminds me of the coast. I can't help but smile. The mulberry is in flower – also known as serviceberry, Indian pear, Juneberry, Saskatoon berry... take your pick. Spruce trees are now showing hot pink flowers. Other plants in flower: wild honeysuckle with their drooping yellow/purple bell-shaped flowers, goldthread, with its exquisitely delicate white and gold flowers (and golden roots), and the violets are strutting their stuff: purple and white. Buffalo berry (*Shepherdia Canadensis*) is flowering but starting to show their characteristic scaly leaf selves. They look like they are rusting underneath, and are found in areas with gypsum. Other flowering trees are attracting bees: wild plum and cherry, red maple, willow.

Last week we were invited by Allan Palmer to explore his farm as part of our walk. We entered a back field from the old railway, and it was filled with lush forage, along with dandelions and violets. An old woods sleigh path through the Commons was visible on the right as we climbed the hill. It reminded us that the Palmers had cut and hauled all the wood for their farm house and barns by themselves.

At the top of the field, there was a marker showing this was the highest point on the peninsula. A tower used to stand there, that lined up with other towers. Lights from the towers would be used for survey work. Now the tower is gone, but the marker remains.

Beside the marker is a pond, one of many developed for the farm cattle watering system. The ponds gravity feed to a central paddock watering system that the cattle always have access to, no matter which paddock they are in at the back of the farm. This system keeps cattle out of streams and ponds. Allan expressed concern that if the gypsum mine expands into the peninsula, the blasting might threaten his elaborate watering system. His farm is sitting on a rich gypsum deposit.

The state of the art system of rotational grazing, where cattle are moved from one paddock to another through the grazing season, helps to improve productivity of both the herd and the forage they feed on. By dividing a large pasture into sections, Allan can ensure the cattle graze each paddock down evenly, then move to the next paddock before the animals start to regaze – and therefore weaken – the most desirable species. This also helps with parasite control. Moving the cattle often prevents them from grazing near their manure, which has time to break down before the animals are rotated back into that paddock. Allan also told us each paddock has shade.

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grave sites had greener grass than surrounding areas. As we were discussing the Acadian history of the farm, a white tailed deer looked up at us casually, then bounded off. I guess it was taking advantage of the lush pastures too.

Near the honey bee yard, we crossed a brook that joins many people on the peninsula. This brook runs from behind the little quarry ponds, through Roseway Farm's woodlot, through Keith and Rosie Hare's farm, Allan and Joy's farm, and on through John and Shelly Lake's, the old Benedict place, and on to Hugh and Alison McNeil's where it meets the river. These people are connected by a ribbon of water that joins them all – and they will certainly be affected if a quarry is established near its source.

We climbed another hill through a hayfield lush with legumes (clovers and alfalfa), and met Allan at the top. As we stood there talking, an eagle flew over us, heading for the hedgerows of misty white mulberry that separate fields, and beyond to the Kennetcook river (where eagles and porpoises have been hunting fish on the low tide).

Allan told us of his plans to open a farm museum so that people could see their farming heritage on display – milk wagons, harvesters, tractors and other farm equipment all restored. As we entered the farmyard, we met Fred Palmer, a spry 85-year old who used to drive the school bus and teach industrial arts. Fred and Raymond reminisced about the inlaid wood chess board they had built together 35 years ago at school. Raymond used it up until the day his Avondale home went up in smoke in 1997.

The walk certainly gave us an appreciation for Allan and Joy's hard work, talents, and commitment to the Peninsula. For his part, Allan says the peace and serenity of the farm are very important to him.

One of the faithful Rangers, Mira McNeil, was able to sum up our recent walks:

"The palette of colours of woods, fields, rivers and sky at this time of year is irresistible, the lime green of birches with its white or gold bark against forest green of hemlocks, rusty reds of flowering maples, white hawthorns blooms all intertwined gracefully with a clear blue sky, and the chocolaty browns of Avon river painting priceless art, that no money can buy!"

Anyone is welcome to join in on the Rangers walks. We meet at the Avon River Heritage Museum in Avondale at 11 am on Sundays. The walks are **guided** and take about **two hours**. **Call 792-0272 if you are interested in joining in, or just show up Sunday morning.**

Peninsula Rangers Report, August 2006 **draft for review**

The Webb of Life

The Rangers have often started walks to the interior of the Peninsula on what is now Garnet Lake's land. We pass an abandoned orchard that was planted by John Webb and his father Bill. Every time we pass it, someone comments on the potential fruit production. In the winter we have gone past it on skis and tasted the frozen apples still hanging in the trees. The season for apple harvest is upon us again. A good time to share a Peninsula orchard story.

Anyone who has driven through Avondale will notice two beautiful white mansions with green trim. Between them is a small road that leads past an apple warehouse, and an orchard of apples, cherries, plums, pears, and even quince trees. Past the orchard are hayfields, hedgerows, and dyke land. It is a beautiful place to walk – magical even. At the end of the land is a running dyke that protects it from the Avon River's tides. From the top of the running dyke one can see the river with its muddy banks and variety of bird life. Windsor and Falmouth are in the background, but a prominent feature of the town's waterfront is the large brick apple storage warehouse by the rail line – a testament to the days when tree fruit production was a major economic activity in the area.

William (Bill) Webb was an immigrant from Devon England who came to the Kentville area, where he began work on fruit farms. Eventually he moved to Avondale, an area that reminded him of the hills and tidal rivers of Devon.

Bill worked the Mounce orchard in Avondale for **XXX** years in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. This was a time when orchards were sprayed with DDT, and heavy metals, to control fruit pests. Although the Mounce orchard was sprayed with fungicides to control scab and other fungal diseases, Bill was reluctant to spray insecticides, because the 'good bugs' would be killed along with the pests. He spent a lot of time observing the trees, insects, and other life in the beautiful orchard by the Avon River. Bill's son John tells me that pest management was based on good fertility, proper pruning, and protection of the beneficials. These included insects, birds, and other organisms in the soil. Both of Bill's sons, Paul and John, independently told me that researchers from the Kentville agricultural station would come to see their father on a regular basis to learn about orchard management.

"Dad was always out observing, and he would come up with ways of doing things that those guys in Kentville were interested in." For example, on the yellow delicious apple, a fungus would cause dots on the apple. If the fungicide was sprayed before the sun hits it – first thing in the morning – it would be effective. If sprayed after, it was ineffective. I asked Paul, a bit of a historian, if there was any record of his father's work and observations in the orchard. "No," he said, "nothing."

During the time when he managed the orchard, Bill would hire picking crews of 12 to 14 people every year to harvest the crop. "In the 50s it was all men," explains John, "but in the 60s and 70s, it was all women." In the 60s, the men had better opportunities in construction, so women took over the harvesting jobs.

The apples were, for a time, shipped overseas in barrels. "Those barrels were heavy!" remarks John as he shakes his head. The barrels were mostly brought in from the Chester Road, but for a time they were assembled in Avondale. I wonder to myself about the barrels, remembering that black ash was a favoured wood for the best barrels, but it was used so much for apple barrels, the tree is a rarity now in the province. Except on the peninsula, where I see them growing everywhere in the woods, along brooks and in wetter ground.

While the overseas shipping of apples was short-lived, the fruit was sold for many years to individual grocery stores. Dropped fruit was gathered up and brought to the juice plant in Hantsport. In later years, when the grocery business became amalgamated, and head offices

wanted fewer suppliers, the Mounce orchard fruit supply **could no longer be** sold to individual stores. For the past few years, the fruit has been just dropping and rotting.

Between the warehouse and the larger Mounce mansion, there is a small road through the orchard, leading towards the house where Bill Webb and his family lived, and the Avondale cemetery. Along the way are quince trees – a rarity in modern orchards. While I favour the spicy flavour of quince in applesauce, John Webb remembers putting quince in his closet because it smelled so good. John also mentioned that although they didn't grow peaches commercially, his father would have a few peach trees interspersed throughout the orchard to have some for his family. They were too precious to sell. And where is the strawberry apple? – a particularly tasty variety John remembers from his childhood. The cherries were always popular with Halifax families of Italian descent. It was a u-pick, although that word was a more modern invention. The same families have been coming back for years to pick the cherries in Avondale, according to Pat Mounce, who now lives in one of the mansions. She also told me the crows are getting the better of the cherries now. When I mentioned this to John, he said, "we took care of crows with guns. They are highly intelligent birds, and it was a shame to kill them. We hung them up to discourage the others. Some of the u-pick customers didn't like the crows we hung up."

I had to ask about the cider-making. "Yes," recalls Paul, "we made cider." He is talking about hard cider – the alcoholic kind, even though I was thinking of the sweet kind. "Takes the legs right out from under you." John also recalled the effect of drinking hard cider. "Makes your legs go." This was also confirmed by Raymond Parker, a friend of the Webbs who lived across the road at Roseway Farm. I guess there were some good parties in Avondale. He also confirmed that the Webbs have always been lively storytellers.

In the 80s, when Paul was packing up to go work out west, he had a guest from the UK named Rosamund. She had come to the area to study wool arts from the Zilligs in nearby Scotch Village. She was also a student of things spiritual. Apparently she got up one morning at sunrise, took her clothes off, and danced on William Webb's grave in the cemetery bordering the Mounce orchard. She came back to Paul and said: "your father spoke to me. He said 'hey' three times and another word I couldn't make out." Paul was astounded, because his father's greeting for his friends was always "hey hey hey shakes!"

Lime Rangers Reports 2006

May 14

Rangers: Jay and Kevin Bonnycastle; Eva Evans; Mira McNeil; Raymond Parker; Jen Scott; Alan Palmer.

Rangers report:

We started by walking behind Mira McNeil's place through the bush to the old railway line. The spruce flowers were startling deep purple, and the lilly of the valley were just about to flower – as were the starflowers. As we walked towards Alan and Joy Palmer's farm, we saw baneberry and a few other plants that looked like orchids (although they are not flowering yet).

Alan had contacted Raymond during the week to show him the farm and its features. Raymond did his best to remember Alan's stories. We entered a field from the old railway, and it was filled with lush forage, along with dandelions and violets. An old sleigh path to the commons was visible on the right as we climbed the hill. Alan and Joy had wood cut and milled for the house and barns. At the high point of the field, there was a marker showing that this was the highest point on the peninsula. A tower used to stand there, that lined up with other towers. Lights from the towers would be used for survey work. Now the tower is gone, but the marker remains.

Beside the marker is a pond, one of many developed for the farm cattle watering system. The ponds gravity feed to a central paddock watering system that the cattle always have access to, no matter which paddock they are in at the back of the farm. This system keeps cattle out of streams and ponds. Alan expressed concern that if the gypsum mine expands into the peninsula, the blasting might threaten his elaborate watering system. His farm is sitting on a rich gypsum deposit.

The system of rotational grazing, where cattle are moved from one paddock to another through the grazing season, helps to improve productivity of both the herd and the forage they feed on. By dividing a large pasture into sections, Alan can ensure the cattle graze each paddock down evenly, then move to the next paddock before the animals start to regraze – and therefore weaken – the most desirable species. This also helps with parasite control. Moving the cattle often prevents them from grazing near their manure, which has time to break down before the animals are rotated back into that paddock. Alan also told us each paddock has shade.

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We climbed another hill through a hayfield lush with legumes (clovers and alfalfa), and met Alan at the top. As we stood there talking, an eagle flew over us, heading for the hedgerows of misty white mulberry that separate fields, and beyond to the meeting of the Avon and Kennetcook rivers.

Alan told us of his plans to open a farm museum so that people could see their farming heritage on display – milk wagons, harvesters, tractors and other farm equipment all restored. As we entered the farm yard, we met Fred Palmer, a spry 85-year old who used to drive the school bus and teach industrial arts. Raymond told us about the inlaid chess board they had built together – used up until the day his Avondale home went up in smoke in 1997.

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May 7, 2006

Rangers: Eva Evans; Eunice and Brad Smith from Burlington; Mira McNeil; Raymond Parker; Jen Scott.

Rangers flora and fauna report:

(I just remembered how we saw a young rabbit in the woods when walking with Scott the Thursday before).

We saw a frog or toad, on the road by the beaver pond. Dragonflies zooming around. Singing from the pond – what was making that noise? We also heard a barred owl. We always do now, somewhere close to the hemlock ravine. Eagles.

Juniper, hackmatack, tamarak, or larch. Completely naked from November to March. It is now flowering – hot pink! Sweetferns are also flowering crimson, and the old dry leaves from last year carry the unique, fresh smell that reminds me of the coast. I can't help but smile. The mulberry was also starting to flower – also known as serviceberry, Indian pear, Juneberry, Saskatoon berry... take your pick. Spruce are now showing hot pink flowers. Other plants in flower: wild honeysuckle with their drooping yellow/purple bell-shaped flowers, goldthread, with its exquisitely delicate white and gold flowers, and the violets are strutting their stuff: purple and white. Buffalo berry (*Shepherdia Canadensis*) is flowering but starting to show their characteristic scaly leaf selves. They look like they are rusting underneath, and are found in areas with gypsum. Other flowering trees are attracting bees: wild plum, red maple, willow.

Mira McNeil's description:

One more great walk in the Avon Peninsula Woods. This time it was even more rewarding as we were able to notice the flowers. The fragrances of the forest were spellbinding. Blooms of sweet ferns, soapberries, junipers, fields of Canadian mayflower (not to be confused with Mayflower), blue and white violets, flowering larch, maple, birches, tiny flowers of gold thread (I think), coltsfoot, grasses, daphne with its purplish pink fragrant flowers still hanging on, bellwort about to open all made delight for all the senses.

The palette of colours of woods, fields, rivers and sky at this time of year is irresistible, the lime green of birches with its white or gold bark against forest green of hemlocks, rusty reds of flowering maples, white hawthorns blooms all intertwined gracefully with a clear blue sky, and the chocolaty browns of Avon river painting priceless art, that no money can buy!

April 30

Rangers: Christie Sheehy, Wendy Scott, Eva Evans, Ben Evans, Raymond Parker, Jay Bonnycastle, Jen Scott, Theresa Newcomb and her son Ojen.

Blooming: mayflowers, wild honeysuckle, coltsfoot, larch. We also heard a barred owl, and saw a pileated woodpecker. I also noticed a little bundle of yellow birch bark tied with a sprig of hemlock, sitting in the hemlock ravine on a fallen tree. Who left that little gift?

April 23

Missed the fun

April 16

We went down to the Museum at 11 and gathered up 23 people for the walk! It was a bit drizzly, but amazingly, it did not rain the whole time we were walking. The Rangers were:

Kimberly (Mounce) ??
Her husband Jamie and two sons, one daughter
Ken and Daphne Greer, Rosie, and Maudie
Clare Henderson (Al had dropped her off)
All the Tackerers: Jason, Heather, Jeremy, Hannah
Hugh McNeil, Mira McNeil
Jay and Kevin Bonnycastle
Mitch Shay and his buddy XXXX Fisher
Jen, Raymond, Eva
Nip and Prince Vince, the trusty dogs
That makes 23 plus two dogs

We walked across the Peninsula, starting at the Ferry Rd. and ending at the Museum. We started around 11:45 and got back about 3 pm.

We went by a big pond that the gypsum company had wanted to drain and put a straight road through. We could hear different kinds of frogs talking – by then it was about noon. Peepers in the middle of the day.

We saw Daphne blooming. Mitchell showed us where he knew the yellow ladyslipper blooms. There was a super abundance of hazel bushes.

We went to visit the old quarry ponds. Mitchell said one of them was very warm – it wouldn't freeze. He pointed to a cluster of gelatinous eggs about the size of my fist and said, those are salamander eggs. We started to look under rocks for salamanders. Clare joined me by the side of the pond and said: those are cool!

The kids ran and got muddy and yelled and explored and laughed and were a joy to have around. While we were waiting for a group of stragglers, we saw a deer jump across the path ahead of us. I had seen a lot of deer tracks in the mud as we climbed a hill.

We looked out over a beautiful vista covered with trees on different elevations. A little while down the path, we saw two stumps – one covered with beige fungal shells. The other was covered with deep purple orange fungal bodies. So beautiful!

We talked about how the moss-covered ravines were such a unique and beautiful land form.

Hants Journal Piece

Peninsula Rangers – April 2006

The Rangers have been gathering steam as more people join in for Sunday walks through the Avondale/ Belmont/Poplar Grove Peninsula. Last week (April 16) we walked from the Ferry Rd right through to Avondale! Despite poor weather forecasts, 23 people of all ages gathered for the ambitious trek through the woods – and it didn't rain until we were all back home.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the coming of spring in the forest. On April 2 we discovered the outrageous crimson wild hazel blooms. It is a rare shrub, but very common on the peninsula. On April 9 we found the fragrant lavender flowers on blooming Daphne shrubs. We also stumbled upon a special hemlock and yellow birch ravine with huge old trees, moss, ferns, and important medicinal herbs like gold thread. We counted the rings on recently cut hemlock showing they were over 100 years old. On April 16 we heard peepers and other frogs expressing their happiness in the middle of the day, found a cluster of salamander eggs in an old quarry pond, and went to an area where yellow lady slippers will be blooming later in the summer. The emerald moss-covered gypsum ravines are simply magical.

The kids who joined in ran and got muddy and explored and laughed and were a joy to have around. Rocks got turned over in case there were salamanders underneath. Many of the rocks we turned over were limestone, so a small group began to think we should call ourselves the Lime Rangers.

Anyone is welcome to join in. We will meet at the **Avon River Heritage Museum in Avondale at 11 am on Sundays**. The walks will be **guided** and take about **two hours**. Wear appropriate clothing and it is a good idea to bring a drink.

Call 792-0272 if you are interested in joining in, or just show up Sunday, 11 am, at the Museum.

April 9

Rangers: Mira McNeil, Raymond Parker, Jen Scott, Coady, other young guy I couldn't remember, Jay and Kevin Bonnycastle, Hugh McNeil, Uta Othmer, Anke and Friedle Kungl, Heather, Jason, Hannah, and Jeremy Tackerer, Judy and her husband Kim Tamsett. (17 plus two dogs)

The highlights: Daphne blooming, hazelnut blooming, and the hemlock ravine. We wandered around in the hemlock ravine marveling at the huge trees (Jay and Kevin said: this is like BC!). Huge! And yellow birch with such startlingly gold bark! Moss, ferns, coptis (gold thread). Yipee!

We got back to the museum and had a hearty lunch of leftovers from Saturday's workshop.

Raymond was astounded that he'd gone by this hemlock ravine so many times and never noticed it before!

April 2

Rangers: Uta Othmer, Friedle Kungl, Mira McNeil, Hugh McNeil, Raymond Parker, Jen Scott, Jason Tackerer, Heather Tackerer, Hanna Tackerer, Jeremy Tackerer, Jay and Kevin Bonnycastle, Nip, and Vincent the trusty dogs. (14).

We went up through the old orchard by the old railway tracks, then went over to look at Ken Mounce's clearcut area. There was a tremendous view from the top of the hill. Meanwhile Jay and Kevin were silently tracking our group the whole time. When we got back close to our starting point, we found a huge elm tree. Uta, Friedle and I hugged it. We also discovered a hazelnut bush with its little tiny perfect hot pink flowers blooming and yellow catkins stretching out.

March 26

Rangers: Mira McNeil, Ken Greer, Raymond Parker, Nick Hughes, Devon Koeller, their little son Finn, Jen Scott, Jay and Kevin Bonnycastle, Tony DeNicola, Emma Greer, Scott Brown, Eva Evans, Uta Othmer, Anke Kungl, Friedle Kungl. Nip the trusty dog. (17)

We started at the old railway line. Ken led the walk this week.

March 19

Rangers: Raymond Parker, Jay Bonnycastle, Jen Scott, Mira McNeil, Uta Othmer, Anke Kungl. Nip the trusty dog. (7)

We went back through the Roseway farm property and back to the Beaver Pond, circling back for tea and popcorn. A 5 hour walk.

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One of the faithful Rangers, Mira McNeil, was able to sum up our recent walks:

“The palette of colours of woods, fields, rivers and sky at this time of year is irresistible, the lime green of birches with its white or gold bark against forest green of hemlocks, rusty reds of flowering maples, white hawthorns blooms all intertwined gracefully with a clear blue sky, and the chocolaty browns of Avon river painting priceless art, that no money can buy!”

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An Urgent Mission for the Rangers

Our leisurely Sunday walks – normally full of stories and news as we get to know each other and welcome new people – have started to take on a more urgent tone. Some people come on the walks to socialize, some to get exercise. Others want to explore the interior of the Peninsula – the spongy, forested area of the watershed. But the ones we have to keep an eye on -- the ones who are really serious -- are the orchid hunters. I will get to that story in a moment.

On May 21 we started our walk at the Malcolms' place in Poplar Grove. At the top of the hill was a stellar view of surrounding farms. Our eyes travel to the Poplar Grove church and beyond copses of trees to the dykelands and rivers.

In the forest, the ground is mossy and we found a wee little toad (or is it a frog?). Smaller than a person's thumb. We saw violets, bunchberry flowers, red berried elder flowers, starflowers, red trilliums, goldthread, clintonia, and the sarsparilla was just about to bloom. The horsetail has emerged. Although it doesn't get taller than your knee now, it was once a prehistoric giant tree. As we rounded the beaver pond near the Ferry Rd., with its beaver dam layers, surrounded by blueberries, and cattails fully green now, we enjoyed the stunning pink rhodora and the silver poplar with its soft little leaves.

By May 28, determination had set in among the orchid hunters. The rangers who showed up for the walk were a little grouchy. One only wanted to walk for one hour, and another was complaining that the timing was not good for her as it broke up her day. But we had a mission: to find the rare yellow lady slippers, and the even more rare Ram's Head orchid. We'd been keeping our eyes peeled for weeks. And they only bloom for a very short time. Raymond Parker, who has been leading many of the Rangers walks, chided us: "We've been walking for twenty minutes, and we haven't seen a bloody orchid!"

We continued our walk, and the very act of walking seems to melt away any tension. The day was stunningly beautiful and we were all distracted by the beaver pond, the swimming hole, the iridescent blue and green insects. Quite a natural wonder up close. After the buffaloberry lookoff, Raymond ducked into the woods off the path. Yellow lady slippers! We followed them. They are right in their prime now. The first ones bright and shiny. So plentiful it was hard not to step on them. We had not meant to go this way. But it was so nice in the hilly network of ravines. We walked along an animal track at the top of a hill, looking down into a swampy area on our right, and a cool hemlock area on our left.

We were off our planned route. We'd been lulled into a new area. We were a bit reluctant to go down the hill. But we found ourselves drawn to a spring in the hillside... Suddenly, one of the orchid hunters got very very happy. "Come right now!", she exclaimed, dancing, singing, laughing.

She'd found them, the little buggers. They are only 15 cm tall and wispy. Hard to see from a distance. They blend in to their surroundings. But we were meant to find them. They called to us.

The Ram's Head orchid was in its prime – splendid, delicate white flowers with wine-coloured vein markings. The opening has white hairs – "like my cat's chin". It is truly a rare jewel. Even Raymond, who is not a flower person, was enchanted. And they were hanging out under the witch hazel tree. A huge one. With its scalloped leaves and spiral trunks. These rare and beautiful plants all like to be near... you guessed it. Water.

These little flowers only bloom for a few days. All of the ephemerals – so brief, so precious, so splendid, so rare – and then they are gone.

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Rangers June report – The Sound of Summer

The Peninsula Rangers – an ever-changing group of people who meet to go for walks in the Avon Peninsula – experienced rainy weather the first two weeks of June. The Rainers! On Sunday June 18, however, it was beautiful, sunny day, with a light breeze. Perfect for a walk in the woods.

The most noticeable plants on this walk were the hazels and the yellow lady slippers. The wild hazel bushes were showing off their clusters of nuts, in twos and threes. I look forward to a competition with squirrels for the nut harvest in September. Most of the time the squirrels win. The yellow lady slippers were very plentiful – whole hillsides of them smiling. This time we noticed their fine scent as well as their charming looks.

Each walk, however, brings new insights into the variety of life around us. This week's peek into the mysteries of the watershed centres around water-loving creatures, like frogs, toads, turtles, and salamanders.

This time of year marks the **Big Transition**. It is when we move from being serenaded at night by spring peepers, to the trilling toads. First, peepers. We are drawn to the edge of

ponds to hear them. Their sound signals to the soul that spring has begun. We would feel bereft without them. But how many of us have seen one? I've tried and tried, with no luck. I looked them up and are they ever cute! They are 2-4 cm long, smaller than my thumb. I was surprised to discover they are 'tree frogs'. They live in forests near ponds, lakes, and streams. The mating takes place in the water, but only after the male manages to snag a female with his peep-peep-peep.

As we walked through the woods, we could hear the odd peeper, but more and more we have been hearing the 'Glug Glug' of the bullfrog, and the high trilling sound that distinctly says: **Summer!!** It is a very relaxing, background kind of sound. Many people I asked – including some of the Rangers – had never taken note of the trilling sound before. It comes from the Eastern American Toad, which is only about 5-10 cm when full grown. It would fit easily in your hand. We have found some smaller than a thumb.

We also found a Northern Leopard Frog by the Beaver Pond in the middle of the Peninsula. Their sound is like a cross between a deep chuckle and a rude sound your little brother would make at the dinner table to annoy parents. The one we saw was green-yellow with spots, almost as big as my hand, looking up – curious, but trying to maintain a low profile...

People from all over the Peninsula have been telling stories about turtles, frogs, salamanders and other water-loving creatures. Rescuing turtle eggs from a trail. Stopping the car to get adult snapping, wood, or painted turtles off the road. An invitation to go out next April in the night with flashlights to see salamanders mating...

One story came from a woman who was just a teenager when her mother was ill in the hospital. Her mother missed her family, and hoped out loud that she could come home in time to hear the spring peepers. She longed to hear their sound. Tragically, she died that year at the beginning of June with the hope and longing still in her heart.

These stories have a lot to teach us. Cherish what we have. Appreciate life. Be thankful that our Spring has not been silent.

Peninsula Rangers Report, July **These Oysters Grow in the Woods**

With all the rain in June, the woods have been blessed with more mushrooms than is usual at this time of year. On most of the Peninsula Rangers walks, we've stopped only briefly to examine mushrooms. Two stumps in particular, on a path with our favourite view of the Avon Peninsula Commons, caught my attention. Every time we passed them, a new set of mushrooms with deep and unusual purple and orange colours had appeared. This is when the mushroom adventures began.

I asked a knowledgeable friend to help me learn about mushrooms; find them; enter their world. I found out that the mushrooms is only a small part of a much larger organism. It is the part that makes 'spores' (like seeds) that allow it to reproduce. The part that we don't see -- the exciting part -- is the massive network of fungal threads called mycelium. Mycelia are like 'roots' for the mushroom. The mycelium and mushroom together is known as a fungus.

Thank goodness there are mushrooms in the woods! Many fungi (pronounced like 'fun guy') have a special relationship with certain trees. The mycelium of the fungus surrounds and penetrates the roots of the tree, and they swap nutrients back and forth, benefiting both. Many trees cannot grow well without their particular fungal 'buddies'. Some fungi hang out with a number of trees. Others only have their association with one special tree.

Trees can resist disease and grow up to 50% faster when happily hanging out with their fungal partners. I can imagine Yoda, the little green character in Star Wars nodding sagely at my fungal discoveries: "Take them for granted no more you will!"

We're walking along in the woods, and see little mushrooms poking up through the forest floor. There they are, minding their own business, looking kind of ordinary, when underneath, the mycelia are doing extraordinary things. In addition to helping trees grow, different mycelia are breaking down dead trees into soil, filtering water, or holding the soil together.

The mycelia form networks in the soil that can filter out silt, pollutants, bacteria (including coliform bacteria), and protozoa from water flowing through them.

This fine living web can also reduce or prevent erosion by calmly 'holding things together' under our feet as we walk. More than a mile of threadlike mycelial cells can be found in a gram of soil. This blows my mind! Nature's fungal filter and woven binder.

"Think like a mushroom," my friend advises as we harvest oyster mushrooms. "Oyster mushrooms like to grow on poplar trees around here. Look on the trees that are standing, but dead. Go around the tree to look at the side facing away from the path." Sure enough, there they are. White, creamy, with beautiful gills underneath. "I could smell them as soon as we started on this path," she said. It was a subtle, indescribable smell.

Oyster mushrooms are not only tasty (please do not eat wild mushrooms without proper guidance). They have special talents in increasing our human immune system's natural defenses when we eat them.

They can help restore landscapes that have been harmed by overharvesting or pollution. As an example, oyster mushrooms have been used to help restore old logging roads. The

roads are covered with woodchips mixed with mushroom spores. In just four years, 5 cm of stable soil can be created.

Oyster mycelia have been used to filter runoff from farm manure lagoons.

They are pioneers in breaking down toxins held together by hydrogen-carbon bonds, such as diesel, oil, and many herbicides and pesticides.

This is just the beginning. Walking through the woods is suddenly a new experience. The soil is a 'fungal fabric', full of life and drama. Dead trees are nurseries for legions of fungal allies. I see mushrooms now as forest guardians, responsible for the vitality and health of their trees. I am keen to continue the mushroom adventures, and find out more about the diversity of fungal life in the woods and fields of Hants County.

Peninsula Rangers Report, August draft for review

The Webb of Life

The Rangers have often started walks to the interior of the Peninsula on what is now Garnet Lake's land. We pass an abandoned orchard that was planted by John Webb and his father Bill. Every time we pass it, someone comments on the potential fruit production. In the winter we have gone past it on skis and tasted the frozen apples still hanging in the trees. The season for apple harvest is upon us again. A good time to share a Peninsula orchard story.

Anyone who has driven through Avondale will notice two beautiful white mansions with green trim. Between them is a small road that leads past an apple warehouse, and an orchard of apples, cherries, plums, pears, and even quince trees. Past the orchard are hayfields, hedgerows, and dyke land. It is a beautiful place to walk – magical even. At the end of the land is a running dyke that protects it from the Avon River's tides. From the top of the running dyke one can see the river with its muddy banks and variety of bird life. Windsor and Falmouth are in the background, but a prominent feature of the town's waterfront is the large brick apple storage warehouse by the rail line – a testament to the days when tree fruit production was a major economic activity in the area.

William (Bill) Webb was an immigrant from Devon England who came to the Kentville area, where he began work on fruit farms. Eventually he moved to Avondale, an area that reminded him of the hills and tidal rivers of Devon.

Bill worked the Mounce orchard in Avondale for XXX years in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. This was a time when orchards were sprayed with DDT, and heavy metals, to control fruit pests. Although the Mounce orchard was sprayed with fungicides to control scab and other fungal diseases, Bill was reluctant to spray insecticides, because the 'good bugs'

would be killed along with the pests. He spent a lot of time observing the trees, insects, and other life in the beautiful orchard by the Avon River. Bill's son John tells me that pest management was based on good fertility, proper pruning, and protection of the beneficials. These included insects, birds, and other organisms in the soil. Both of Bill's sons, Paul and John independently told me that researchers from the Kentville agricultural station would come to see their father on a regular basis to learn about orchard management.

"Dad was always out observing, and he would come up with ways of doing things that those guys in Kentville were interested in." For example, on the yellow delicious apple, a fungus would cause dots on the apple. If the fungicide was sprayed before the sun hits it – first thing in the morning – it would be effective. If sprayed after, it was ineffective. I asked Paul, a bit of a historian, if there was any record of his father's work and observations in the orchard. "No," he said, "nothing."

During the time when he managed the orchard, Bill would hire picking crews of 12 to 14 people every year to harvest the crop. "In the 50s it was all men," explains John, "but in the 60s and 70s, it was all women." In the 60s, the men had better opportunities in construction, so women took over the harvesting jobs.

The apples were, for a time, shipped overseas in barrels. "Those barrels were heavy!" remarks John as he shakes his head. The barrels were mostly brought in from the Chester Road, but for a time they were assembled in Avondale. I wonder to myself about the barrels, remembering that black ash was a favoured wood for the best barrels, but it was used so much for apple barrels, the tree is a rarity now in the province. Except on the peninsula, where I see them growing everywhere in the woods, along brooks and in wetter ground.

While the overseas shipping of apples was short-lived, the fruit was sold for many years to individual grocery stores. Dropped fruit was gathered up and brought to the juice plant in Hantsport. In later years, when the grocery business became amalgamated, and head offices wanted fewer suppliers, the Mounce orchard fruit supply was no longer sold to individual stores. For the past few years, the fruit has been just dropping and rotting.

Between the warehouse and the larger Mounce mansion, there is a small road through the orchard, leading towards the house where Bill Webb and his family lived, and the Avondale cemetery. Along the way are quince trees – a rarity in modern orchards. While I favour the spicy flavour of quince in applesauce, John Webb remembers putting quince in his closet because it smelled so good. John also mentioned that although they didn't grow peaches commercially, his father would have a few peach trees interspersed throughout the orchard to have some for his family. They were too precious to sell. And where is the strawberry apple? – a particularly tasty variety John remembers from his childhood. The cherries were always popular with Halifax families of Italian descent. It

was a u-pick, although that word was a more modern invention. The same families have been coming back for years to pick the cherries in Avondale, according to Pat Mounce, who now lives in one of the mansions. She also told me the crows are getting the better of the cherries now. When I mentioned this to John, he said, “we took care of crows with guns. They are highly intelligent birds, and it was a shame to kill them. We hung them up to discourage the others. Some of the u-pick customers didn’t like the crows we hung up.”

I had to ask about the cider-making. “Yes,” recalls Paul, “we made cider.” He is talking about hard cider – the alcoholic kind, even though I was thinking of the sweet kind. “Takes the legs right out from under you.” John also recalled the effect of drinking hard cider. “Makes your legs go.” This was also confirmed by Raymond Parker, a friend of the Webbs who lived across the road at Roseway Farm. I guess there were some good parties in Avondale. He also confirmed that the Webbs have always been lively storytellers.

In the 80s, when Paul was packing up to go work out west, he had a guest from the UK named Rosamund. She had come to the area to study wool arts from the Zilligs in nearby Scotch Village. She was also a student of things spiritual. Apparently she got up one morning at sunrise, took her clothes off, and danced on William Webb’s grave in the cemetery bordering the Mounce orchard. She came back to Paul and said: “your father spoke to me. He said ‘hey’ three times and another word I couldn’t make out.” Paul was astounded, because his father’s greeting for his friends was always “hey hey hey shakes!”

Peninsula Rangers – April 2006

The Rangers have been gathering steam as more people join in for Sunday walks through the Avondale/Belmont/Poplar Grove Peninsula. This week we walked from the Ferry Rd right through to Avondale! Despite poor weather forecasts, 23 people of all ages gathered for the ambitious trek through the woods – and it didn't rain until we were all back home.

Over the past few weeks, we have witnessed the coming of spring in the forest. On April 2 we discovered the outrageous crimson wild hazel blooms. It is a rare shrub, but very common on the peninsula. On April 9 we found the fragrant lavender flowers on blooming Daphne shrubs. We also stumbled upon a special hemlock and yellow birch ravine with huge old trees, moss, ferns, and important medicinal herbs like gold thread. We counted the rings on recently cut hemlock showing they were over 100 years old. On April 16 we heard peepers and other frogs expressing their happiness in the middle of the day, found a cluster of salamander eggs in an old quarry pond, and went to an area where yellow lady slippers will be blooming later in the summer. The emerald moss-covered gypsum ravines are simply magical.

The kids who joined in ran and got muddy and explored and laughed and were a joy to have around. Rocks got turned over in case there were salamanders underneath. Many of the rocks we turned over were limestone, so a small group began to think we should call ourselves the Lime Rangers.

Anyone is welcome to join in. We will meet at the **Museum in Avondale at 11 am on Sundays.** The walks will be **guided** and take about **two hours.**

Call 792-0272 if you are interested in joining in, or just show up Sunday, 11 am, at the Avondale Museum.

Penninsula Rangers find weekly walks rewarding

Jennifer Scott
The Hants Journal

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Rangers Report – October

The Wood Frog is Losing its Woods

The Rangers were on a quest in the Avon Peninsula to find the fragrant, delicate white orchid. A quest is good, because our eyes are open and we are alert. Open eyes makes it easier to find so many other creatures, and enjoy the seasonal changes. This time, we found changes of another sort.

The orchid might be called Lady's Tresses, but we are not sure. Identification has been tricky. Finding it was not. Shortly after the walk began, it appeared, in all its miniature glory. A slender stalk with little white frilly bells. Further on there were more!

"That frog has a mask on," remarks one of our group members as the little fellow hops to the base of an orchid. We pick it up to look at it closely. It is a wood frog. During the spring breeding season, the males are darker and the 'mask' is less pronounced than in the summer and fall when they are greyish. Three of them could fit in my small hands. Before putting it down, we noticed a beautiful golden line along the edge of the black mask. What an intriguing little creature. I'm glad I finally met one up close. I've been hearing them for years in the spring, and always thought of them as 'laughing frogs'. They make a sound part way between a chuckle and a quack. If you want to hear the sound, check out the Frog Watch site: www.naturewatch.ca/english/frogwatch/learn_frogs.asp?Province=ns. Wood frogs in the Peninsula are not laughing now.

Further along the walk, the changes to the Commons are difficult to ignore. An area where people used to walk, work, and drive freely is now 'out of bounds'. No trespassing signs are springing up. Shaded woodland paths and roads have been turned into rutted, straight, and wide scars for heavy equipment. Ponds are now silted up from the road-building erosion. The forested banks home to yellow lady slippers and other species have been trashed. One person in our group, who has been drinking in the beauty of the Peninsula's interior all spring and summer, stopped at her favourite hillside and said: "I can't go any further. I just can't handle any more destruction."

The magical gypsum woods are being opened up and carted off. There is a difference between local people making a living at harvesting trees over a lifetime in a forest, which is part of the history of the Peninsula Commons, and a contractor that harvests whole forests in a matter of days.

The Rangers are observing a shift from harvesting to destruction. Why is the middle of the Peninsula being changed so dramatically, when there isn't even a permit to develop it? When there are baseline studies being conducted? The idea of a baseline study is to study an area *before* it is changed. The community still has not had an opportunity to properly explore the area, consider all its potentials, learn what it has to offer, and figure out, in turn, what we have to offer back.

*Include photo of Lady's Tresses orchid, and Wood frog.

The Wood Frog is Losing its Wood

BY JENNIFER SCOTT

For The Hants Journal

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The orchid might be called Ladies' Tresses. There are six types in Nova Scotia, two of them recently discovered. Identification has been tricky. Finding it was not. Shortly after the walk began, it appeared, in all its miniature glory. The flowers are tiny, with three spirals around a short stem.

"That frog has a black

mask on, like Zorro" remarks one of our group members as the little fellow hops to the base of an orchid. We pick it up to look at it closely. It is a wood frog. During the spring breeding season, the males are darker and the 'mask' is less pronounced than in the summer and fall when they are greyish. Three of them could fit in my small hands. Before putting it down, we noticed a beautiful golden line along the edge of the black mask. What an intriguing little creature! I'm glad I finally met one up close. I've been hearing them for years in the spring, and always thought of them as 'laughing frogs'. They make a sound part way between a chuckle and a quack. If you want to hear the sound, check out the Frog Watch site: www.nature-watch.ca/english/frog-

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(SUBMITTED)

WOOD FROG

This wood frog makes an unusual sound during its active season and is tiny enough to easily fit in one's hand.

An Urgent Mission for the Rangers

Peninsula Rangers continue Sunday walks in Avondale area woodlands

BY JEN SCOTT

Our leisurely Sunday walks – normally full of stories and news as we get to know each other and welcome new people – have started to take on

a more urgent tone. Some people come on the walks to socialize, some to get exercise. Others want to explore the interior of the Peninsula – the spongy, forested area

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WATERSHED PRESERVATION SOCIETY

not a flower person, was enchanted. And they were hanging out under the witch hazel tree. A huge one. With its scalloped leaves and spiral trunks. These rare and beautiful plants all like to be near... you guessed it. Water.

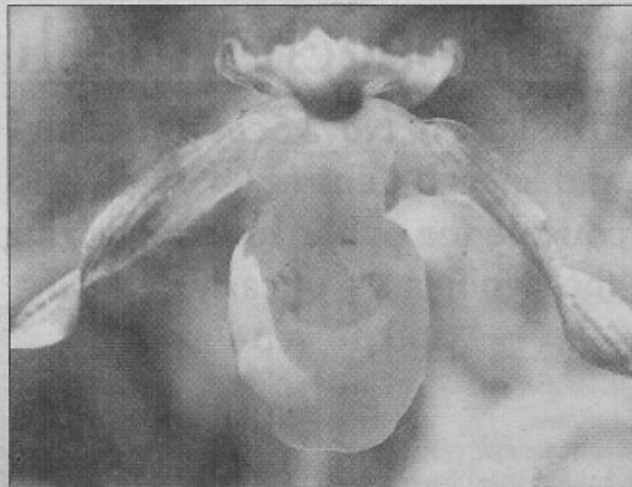
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INTERESTED?

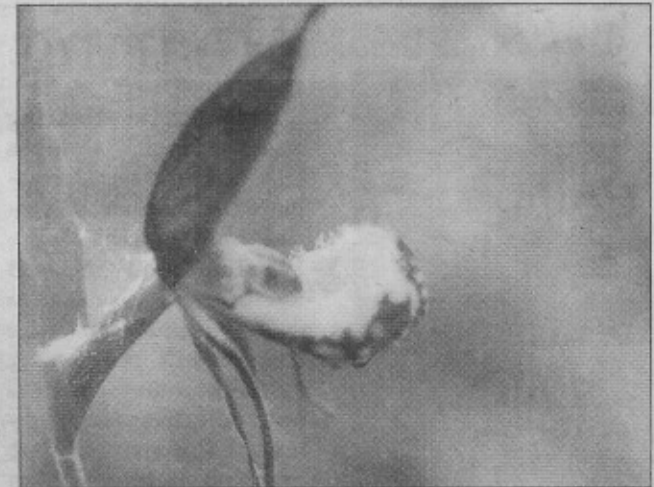
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A tiny toad found in the moist, mossy forest floor.



A Yellow Lady Slipper found along the trail.



The elusive Ram's' Head Orchid found the group.