A NATURE WALK IN FERRIS PROVINCIAL PARK

Organized by the Friends of Ferris:
http://www.friendsofferris.ca/

Ferris park, Campbellford, Ontario, Sunday, 3rd October, 2010

Land and People. Trent Hills forms the northeast corner of Northumberland county. The area, which includes Ferris park and the Seymour and Crowe Bridge conservation areas, offers a diversity of landscape features on both sides of the watershed of the Trent river. Much of the district offers a farmer fertile soils, though local conditions can be challenging: poorly-drained here; over there shallow soil atop limestone bedrock (the “alvar” ecosystem). Much of the park is former farmland. In this area, stone walls and split-rail fencing, apple trees and sumac may all indicate the presence of early settlement. In 2009-2010, demonstration portions of the kilometres-long system of degraded dry stone walls were restored to their former glory. The walls are built largely of local flaggy limestones, containing brachiopod, crinoid and bryozoan fossils. Other aspects of human endeavour can be traced along the gorge, the west boundary of the park. The bed of the river harbours evidence of the brief heyday of the lumber industry. Locks 11-12 of the Trent-Severn waterway lie just south of the hydro-electric power station, a 9-megawatt facility comprising the 1922 main hall and 1926 "pup" hall, first used to supply an old tannery. The suspension bridge was constructed in late 2002 to 2003, and opened officially in 2004.

Rocks. The bedrock, so well exposed in the gorge of the Trent around the suspension bridge, and just upstream at Ranney Falls, is fossiliferous limestone of middle Ordovician age, belonging to the Bobcaygeon and overlying Verulam formations, deposited some 440 million years ago. In truth, the limestone, the northern fringe of a large, warm-water, marine sedimentary basin, is a thin skin atop much older rocks of the Canadian shield. These older rocks can be found in place near Crowe Bridge, in the open pit of the Marmoraton iron mine, and northwards of highway 7. Some of the rock types of the Grenville province of the shield, which includes much of the land east from Georgian Bay to the Ottawa valley and beyond, are represented in the boulders delineating the car park. These hefty blocks include: local limestone; metabasalt; leucogranite; magnetic pyroxenite; and metagabbro. All but the first are considered to be rocks from the Canadian shield, somewhat older than 1,000 million years. Overlying the limestone bedrock is a sheet of glacial till, the detritus left by the retreating ice sheets in the last glaciation, and soils developed in the past 10 thousand years. Other gifts from the ice are whale-backed hills (drumlins), forming the scenic north end of the park, and glacial erratics, metre-scale boulders rafted south by the ice during its earlier advance.

Wildflowers. The Trails weekend is well-timed to see the fall colours, especially the oranges and reds of the sugar maples and sumac bushes. It is 6 or 8 weeks late, however, in terms of the beautiful diversity of local wildflowers! In August, it is quite easy to see 20 to 30 or more species in the space of a kilometre-long stroll. By the end of September, a riot of asters (which include goldenrods) dominate the flora: panicled aster, New England aster and heath aster are easy to spot. A few late survivors of summer should also be visible.

Woodlands. The woods in the park are a delight. They are quite varied, from stands of American beech on the drumlin hills to planted white spruce and lowland concentrations of red and white cedars. The northern white-cedar grows well on limestone soils and in moist to boggy conditions, thus it thrives in parts of Ferris and nearby Seymour conservation area. Species of ash, birch, aspen, oak, basswood, hickory, ironwood (hophornbeam) and butternut may also be found. Imported "exotics" can be found, such as the Japanese barberry. The shrubs include juniper, barberry, red-osier dogwood and prickly ash.

Birds. As with the flowers, October is a month or two late for some of the birds that frequent the park, as resident breeders in summer or as passage migrants in spring and fall. Ospreys ("fish eagles") breed at many sites along the Trent-Severn waterway. Nest platforms have been built for them in and near the park. They generally arrive in late March, nest and fish for the summer, and depart in early September. The less-glamourous turkey vulture, most often seen tilting into the wind, is present in the same months. In the past year, two designs of nests have been erected for chimney swifts, welcome insect-eating visitors whose twilight flights over town are a summer treat. The pileated woodpecker is present, albeit in small numbers, year-round, and has bred in the park. Their distinctive rectangular holes are hammered deep into older trunks of white cedar and white pine. Other hardy birds that may be seen here are cedar waxwings, blue jays, and juncos. Hummingbirds, swallows, and most warblers have left by the end of September. Chickadee, kingfisher and heron, amongst others, may still be found in October.

Beasts. Monarch butterflies alight here to feed on milkweed and other plants, and are mostly seen from mid-June to mid-September. Larger creatures may be spied in the woods from time to time, from frogs and chipmunks to white-tailed deer, and more!

References

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TURNSTONE GEOLOGICAL SERVICES LIMITED web site, http://www.turnstone.ca, has several local components, e.g., http://www.turnstone.ca/local.htm, a page which links to a **bird list** for Seymour township (eastern Trent Hills, since amalgamation), a list of **flora and fauna**, related references, a geologically-oriented local **bibliography**, and other features. There are also a number of descriptions of local rocks ("Rock of the Month" feature) listed in the web-site map, including a fossil (no.11), gabbro boulders (nos. 13 and 28) and chert in limestone (no.76).

Graham Wilson, 30th September 2010