

Partnering for Presence

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The Bruce Trail Conservancy has a strong history of preserving and conserving Niagara Escarpment land. In this issue of Bruce Trail Magazine we celebrate those land acquisition successes we've accomplished in the past 50 years through partnerships – partnerships that have advanced our mission and led to better preservation of the Niagara Escarpment.

On pages 28 to 31 we profile several properties acquired through the efforts of the BTC in partnership with government agencies, other conservation organizations and conservation-minded individuals. In this article we provide the stories behind a few of these acquisitions. Most partnerships were formed as a way to pool financial resources, but all have led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the roles of the different partners in preserving and conserving the Niagara Escarpment and the Bruce Trail we know and love.

Malcolm Bluff Shores: An Historical Partnership Comes Full Circle

The Bruce Trail has long been connected to the land at Malcolm Bluff. For more than 40 years a 4 km stretch of the Trail has passed through the property along the cliffs, giving tremendous views over Colpoys Bay, all by permission of the landowner.

Then, in 2005, the property changed hands. The new owners intended to create a development along the shoreline, complete with a road, marina, and cottages. When this proved unfeasible, they turned to logging as a way of recouping funds, but fortunately at the same time began discussions with the BTC over purchase of the lands. At stake was a staggering 4 kilometres of unspoiled shoreline, Niagara Escarpment cliff face and main Bruce Trail, with habitat for species such as ancient Eastern White Cedar, Scarlet Tanager, Peregrine Falcon, Fisher, Male

Fern, and Canada Warbler, to name a few.

In May 2009, after three years of complex negotiations, the BTC finally had agreements in place to purchase the three magnificent parcels of land at Malcolm Bluff Shores over a three year period. With a price tag of over \$2 million, we needed that time. And we needed partners.

We were delighted when Ontario Nature (formerly the Federation of Ontario Naturalists) indicated their interest in partnering with us on this tremendous acquisition. They, too, recognized the ecological importance of the area: the largest continuously-forested, privately-owned parcel of land left in Southern Ontario. Our two organizations have a common history, the work of establishing the Bruce Trail having been coordinated by the Federation of Ontario Naturalists' Bruce Trail Committee in 1962. It was wonderful to come back together almost 50 years later to partner on this exciting project.

An agreement was created with Ontario Nature whereby it would acquire two of the parcels, with a total price of about \$1 million, and the BTC would acquire the third parcel, with a total price of another \$1 million. Stewardship of the properties would be shared by the two organizations.

The parcels were acquired in March 2010 (Ontario Nature), March 2011 (BTC) and March 2012 (Ontario Nature); now Malcolm Bluff Shores – home to numerous Species at Risk such as the Monarch Butterfly, Hart's Tongue Fern, Milk Snake, Peregrine Falcon and Cooper's Milk Vetch – is in the permanent protection of our two organizations.

Government Partnerships

Government partnerships are entered into primarily for funding purposes, although partnering can provide other benefits, particularly regarding severances.

In the heady days of land acquisition, the Province of Ontario provided 100% funding for land acquisitions through various Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) funding programs. Beginning in 2005 that funding was reduced to 50% funding, then partial funding, and now there is no dedicated funding available for significant land acquisition costs from the MNR. Examples of some of our past acquisitions in partnership with the MNR include Lindenwood and Glassford Wetland (where the Nature Conservancy

of Canada was administrator of the MNR funds), the Haddock Property, Pear Tree Park and the Campbell Property (see pages 28 and 31).

While MNR funding has been cut these past several years, on occasion funds do come available – sometimes from other Provincial agencies such as the Ontario Heritage Trust (OHT), who provided 50% funding for several BTC acquisitions between 2006 and 2009 under their *Natural Spaces Land Acquisition and Stewardship Program* (NSLASP), for purchase of Walter's Creek and Williams Caves, for example. More recently, funding has been provided by forward-thinking municipalities such as the Region of Halton who know the importance of protecting green spaces in rapidly developing Southern Ontario, and who helped fund Speyside Sanctuary and Cedar Springs Woods. Funding partnerships with the OHT and the municipalities help supplement funds from our generous donors.

The Ontario Heritage Trust has also partnered with the BTC to assist us in achieving severances of land. Until about 2006 or 2007 the municipal consent process for severances was new and somewhat daunting for the BTC. The OHT was able to assist the BTC in taking portions of land for conservation purposes in a more straightforward manner (for example, the Campbell Property). In these cases, the OHT takes title to the land. Nowadays the BTC acquires its own severances through the municipal consent process, which has become less daunting as we continue to acquire severances under the skillful execution of our professional planning staff.

The Merkel Property: A Four-Way Partnership to Success

The Merkel Property, 52 acres of wooded beauty in the West Rocks area of Owen Sound, contains Bruce Trail Optimum Route and provides a key access from below the Escarpment. What makes the Merkel acquisition special is the four-way partnership by which it was purchased: the BTC, Grey-Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA), the City of Owen Sound and Grey County. With limited available funds, no one group at the time wanted to tackle the full asking price, but by combining resources the acquisition was possible.

The story of how this arrangement came about should be celebrated widely.



Photo: Imani Outdoors

Peregrine Falcon

Ron Savage of the Sydenham Club tells the story: “The idea of going after Merkel with 4 partners came up with a conversation Chris Hachey and I had about the property. (Chris is the Property Manager for GSCA.) It was a time when neither the GSCA nor the BTC had a lot of capital money to invest in acquisitions (the BTC was deep into a major fundraising campaign for 5 other significant properties). We discussed the alternatives and decided that a possible course of action was to enlist the help of the other two partners – the City of Owen Sound and Grey County – as it would be to their mutual benefit. The City of Owen Sound at that time was going through a study of the trail systems in the City. I had encouraged them to broaden that view point to include the trails around the city as well – which they did.

“Chris Hachey should be given most of the credit for pulling the idea off. He met numerous times with the City planners, the City Council, the County of Grey administrators as well as Land Securement staff at the BTC. He managed to ‘stick handle’ the project through all the different levels of government. There were numerous hurdles to overcome but finally, after almost a year of negotiations, the deal was made.”

Chris and the GSCA can also be credited with completing the negotiations with the landowner, which is a major task in Land Securement. Adding to the work done by Ron and Chris, BTC staff worked with our legal counsel to create an agreement for the partnership that was acceptable to all parties, and ensured that the goals of the BTC were met. This included establishing a buffer along the Trail route where trees could not be cut, and ensuring that the partners would take steps to prohibit bike use on the Bruce Trail portion of the property.

Hemlock Ridges: In Ride the White Knights

Many properties listed for sale on the Optimum Route of the Trail contain expensive buildings, or have potential as building sites. Often, these factors translate into a fairly large price tag. In many cases, the owners wish to sell the entire property, and are not willing to sell only the portion required for the Trail corridor. The BTC usually does not always have sufficient available funds to purchase such properties, hold them until the desired portion has been severed, and



then re-sell the remainder. Consequently, the property may be sold to an “unfriendly” buyer (unfriendly either to a partial sale of the land, or possibly to even having the Trail on their land at all), and the opportunity secure the Trail corridor may be lost forever.

In ride the White Knights.

A White Knight (or “conservation investor”) is a person friendly to the Bruce Trail, who is willing to invest some of their own funds in a property for a period of time, in order to facilitate acquisition of a portion of the property by the BTC.

The acquisition of the Hemlock Ridges in 2009 is a great example of a White Knight partnership at work.

Hemlock Ridges is located on the south side of the Hockley Valley, just a short distance west of Airport Road. In 2008 Caledon Hills Club Landowner Relations Director Carol Sheppard was successful in obtaining agreements with landowners to cross 6 of the 7 properties necessary to complete a link from Airport Road to the 5th Line. The landowner at the 7th property – later to be known as Hemlock Ridges – was not agreeable to the Trail on his land. We seemed to be at an impasse, until the landowner made the decision to sell his land. The opportunity to complete the final link was at hand.

The BTC wanted to purchase a portion of the land, but not all of it, as it contained a developable building lot. Dave Moule and Sally Cohen, long-time members, volunteers and donors, stepped in as “White Knights”, purchasing the entire property on the understanding that the BTC would in turn arrange for a severance and buy the conservation corridor

portion of the land from them. This transaction was completed in 2009. Through this White Knight partnership, an important link in the Bruce Trail’s conservation corridor was permanently secured.

Deciding to Partner

Usually the decision to enter into a partnership revolves around the ability to share resources - particularly financial resources. But regardless of the perceived benefits, partnerships shouldn’t be entered into lightly. It’s essential that the goals of the organizations involved aren’t compromised and that the expectations of each partner are known up front. Some of the questions we ask when forming partnerships to secure land: are the aims and goals of the partners compatible, or might there be conflicting uses of the property that arise? How will the funding responsibilities be divided? Who will take title? Who will do the negotiations for the acquisition? Who will steward the land in the short- and long-term? What happens if one partner doesn’t keep their commitments? *All good questions!* And all that must be considered based on the unique characteristics of each partnership as they are conceived.

As the BTC works towards its goal of securing the entire conservation corridor along the Niagara Escarpment, the need for funding assistance will be an ever-present reality. Partnerships – in the many varied forms they take – are a key tool to bringing us closer to our goal. We all benefit from the preservation of natural spaces within our communities and throughout the Niagara Escarpment. •