



Friends of
Mashkinonje

THE WETLANDS OBSERVER

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Home of the Bobcat, the Snow Bunting, and numerous other species



MASHKINONJE – PROGRESS CONTINUES

By Chuck Miller, Park Superintendent

Killarney / French River / Mashkinonje / W. Sandy Island / Manitou Islands Provincial Parks

Just after the calendar turned to 2006 Friends volunteers, Peter and Harley, led a very pleasant snowshoe hike on a section of the new Samoset Trail starting at Memquisit Road. Conditions were mild with about 20 cm of snow. The sun poked through late in the afternoon after a foggy morning. We saw black-capped chickadees, nuthatches (red and white-breasted), ruffed grouse and woodpeckers (hairy and downy). The snow had also melted earlier in the week leaving snow sculptures on the twigs in the forests that looked like dog sled teams to some and circus animals to others depending upon individual imaginations.

Where the new trail crosses Samoset Creek the blue heron nests of the previous year could be seen with binoculars. These nests will be active next spring so the trail intentionally stays away from them to prevent disturbance – but I made a mental note to come back this way next spring with a spotting scope. The trail follows rock ridges and crosses to a very rich black ash/red maple wetland with some of the largest trees of this type in the park. Shortly after, another black ash/red maple forest appears, however, this time a much younger forest, and then Samoset Road.

New opportunities to explore the multitude of wetlands continue to develop through the combined efforts of many community partners.

The *Friends* cleared the Loudon Peatlands Trailhead parking lot and, together with local contractors D&.J General Contracting, Bayview Excavating, the Municipality of French River and Ontario Parks, supplied gravel to the access road from Highway #64 and to the parking lot. Progress was also made in placing some crusher fines as we move forward to make 600m of the Loudon Peatlands Trail open to people with disabilities. Harley of the *Friends* supervised the work as well as providing hands on labour to the project.

In the fall of 2005 Ontario Parks was successful in getting some funding for trail development and for signs and for the hiring of two staff for two months. Erik Koopman and Lisette Brunet worked out of Welcome Lodge with *Friends of Mashkinonje* volunteers and occasional helpers from French River and Killarney Provincial Parks to establish about 30km of trail west of highway #64. Although these trails are not yet complete they are cleared of large trees and shrubs, marked with trail markers, located using GPS and cleared of cut materials.

Parking lots, bridges and boardwalks still need to be constructed; intersection and trail head signs established; cutting the stumps low (after the cut vegetation was removed); side trails to desired lookouts – located and cut; crossings on beaver dams stabilized; and any minor trail location adjustments. There is still much work ahead. The Municipality of French River has applied for grants to further the work in 2006.

The funding also allowed the posting of regulatory signs, a main trailhead sign support at the Loudon Peatlands and trailhead sign structure supports for 6 additional trailheads. Thanks you to all those who have worked to make the joys of Mashkinonje available to many more people.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



By Angela Martin

Last year at this time, I said that 2005 would be a year to remember and it certainly was. One always hopes for progress and you try your best to make a difference; well the accomplishments of 2005 were momentous. The shared vision between Ontario Parks, the *Friends of Mashkinonje* and the Municipality of French River has led to the ribbon cutting event planned for May 13th, 2006. Who would have dreamed that in one year, we would have accomplished so much: cleared,

marked and GPS'd 35kms of trails, built a 300' boardwalk, created the Loudon Peatlands parking lot and installed some of the signage. Our work is far from finished. The trails in the west half of the park still need work and we have to build a bridge across "The Secret Passage", erect more signs, develop two parking lots, create a map of the park trails and design a *Friends of Mashkinonje* brochure. Looking farther down the road, the parks management plan allows us to build a boardwalk into the peatlands, erect a lookout tower at the edge of the peatlands and build a winter shelter.

My favorite spot is still the boardwalk along the Loudon Peatland Trail. For so many years, the wetland where the boardwalk was installed stopped us from reaching the peatlands. Now we can all enjoy both the boardwalk and the peatlands. I am sure as you hike the Mashkinonje trails, you will find your favorite spot. The beauty of a provincial park is that your favorite spot will always be there for you.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS



At our Annual General Meeting before our summer picnic, we elected our new board of directors. Looks familiar, doesn't it?

We would like to thank all the returning directors for their dedicated hard work.

Left to right: Liz, Angela, Chuck, Peter, Carmelle

FOM DIRECTORS

President

Angela Martin

Vice President

Dr. Peter Beckett

Secretary/Treasurer

Liz Lang

Members

Carmelle Girouard

Bob Wilson

Chuck Miller

Friends/Ontario Park
Superintendent

Parks Liaison

Killarney, Ontario

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING AND PICNIC

Fortunately Jim Wotton from the Sudbury Naturalists came to the AGM and picnic and took some great pictures. The day was busy and everyone was having so much fun that no one else took pictures, thank you Jim.

We had a beautiful day for the picnic. We began with the AGM to dispense with the business and re-elect the Board of Directors. The rest of the day was just fun including a barbecue by Gary and desserts by Carmelle. We were well fed giving us lots of energy for bidding on the Silent Auction and hiking the Loudon Peatland Trail. *Friends* donated some great items including Kathy McManus' creation of a "Mashkinonje Heron". The "Mashkinonje Heron" is a very rare bird; it might be one of a kind. I was fortunate enough to win the bidding on the Heron and it hasn't moved since the AGM. One has to attend these activities to find such treasures.



The high point of the day was the hike to the Loudon Peatlands over our new boardwalk. One feels like you are in another world on the boardwalk; with the breeze flowing around the rock rim perimeter and the complimentary colour hues of the plants, trees, water and sky. Although one could linger here all day, there was more to discover so we were led by Dr. Peter Beckett a biologist from Laurentian University. A trip is never short with Peter, he has so much knowledge to share and people keep asking questions. I learn something new on each trip. Although most were tired from the hike their minds were refreshed. We would like to thank all of you who came and shared the day with us. You made it special.

NIPISSING NATURALIST OUTING

An intrepid group of 26 set out on what some of us expected to be a leisurely 2 hour/6km. walk over the new Pebble Beach Trail. On Angela's advice we had been warned that it would be a "challenging" hike. Now I know, when Angela says challenging, she means *challenging*. Dr. Peter Beckett led us along a trail filled with what were new discoveries for many of us. Pebble Beach Trail took us over many ups and downs, over and around bedrock outcrops, and past wetlands, to the shore of the West Arm of Lake Nipissing. We stopped there for a quick lunch and to discuss our discoveries.

Mashkinonje is truly a wondrous wetlands park. Randy Moratz pointed out the 100 year old ground cedar which stands all of 6 inches high and when it reaches the old growth stage it can produce spore-bearing cones. These spores were used to light the first photographic flashes. Peter identified the three caribou lichen: the grey, the green, and the tree, which grow at a rate of 1mm. each year, and the edible lichen which looked like curled shoe leather feathered up rock faces (which Peter advised us tasted much like shoe leather probably tastes). We learned much more, as many of you will remember.

Three and a half hours later we emerged from the newly-marked and brushed trail, far more knowledgeable than we started, thanks to Dr. Beckett, and far more fit. Thinking that my legs were well toned from regular hikes and exercise, I was surprised to be reminded by those same muscles, over the course of the hike and through the following 2 days that they had been challenged/used a little more than they were used to! Don't get me wrong; I was grateful for this chance to shape up a little.

We were joined by Brenda and Rusty from the *Friends of Mashkinonje* (to which many of us from Nip Nats also belong), and Paula, Peter, Brigitte and Randy from the Sudbury Naturalists. Others in attendance were, of course, our gracious hosts, Angela and Gary, along with Cal, Sandra, Linda, Craig, Dick, Ilse, Janis, Lorie, Katharine, Paula, Lucy, Annette, Vittorio, Laura, Brent, Ted, Grace, and of course, yours truly. That adds up to only 25. Okay, who didn't sign our waiver? If you do not as yet belong to the *Friends of Mashkinonje*, I urge you to join, in support of their work and also for the benefits that you will enjoy.

As your new outing coordinator, I take full credit for the fantastic fall weather and the extra hour of sleep you enjoyed, as we "fell back" to standard time. I saw broad smiles on my fellow hikers' faces as we arrived back at Welcome Lodge, and heard many comments of "It's beautiful here", "amazing", and "now *that* was a hike".

Some of you will remember the bobcat, marten, and other prints we discovered in the new-fallen snow at Mashkinonje last winter. Randy confirmed that the fur found near the bobcat tracks was bobcat fur by consulting a trapper. The trapper noted that bobcats are very territorial and even if they were both drifters that just crossed paths, they would get into a scrap. We hope to go once again to see the park in winter on snowshoes.
by Debra Johnson



CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

The Mashkinonje Christmas Bird Count was held on Monday January 2nd. We were very fortunate to have the nicest weather for the count then we have had in our 4 year history. Fifteen feeder watchers, fourteen field observers and two snowshoe leaders watched for birds in the West Nipissing/ Sudbury East circle. The entire circle is contained within the Nipissing Naturalists Club circle. I think of Mashkinonje as the best area because friends and naturalists come from North Bay, South River, Killarney and Sudbury. It is a joining of east and west. The group counted 32 species and 2,013 individual birds.

Every Christmas Bird Count has its surprises. This year, we had more raptors. First for the count were a Bald Eagle and two Red-tailed Hawks in addition to a Rough-legged Hawk and Northern Goshawk seen in previous years. Although the number of individual birds counted was similar to other years, the mix was different. There were fewer flocks of Snow Buntings flying across the fields and not as many winter finches. The good news was there were more Black-capped Chickadees gracing us with their lovely call.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Memquisit Lodge | Randy and Cheryl Moratz |
| Merilyn Parker | Heather Lillico and Michael Powers |
| Paula Jackson | Victoria and Ian Ollers |
| Jeff Soltyssek | Chris and Sally Hicks |
| Janet Alsop | Rita and Jim Schneuker |
| Erik Koopman | Roseanna Rigo and Ray Sweezey |
| Steven Millar | Terry and Cathy Arnshaw |

Moose Bog (\$500)

Harley & Liz Lang
Welcome Lodge
D&J General Contracting
Bayview Excavating
Due North Marketing

Cottongrass Fen (\$250)

Heather Lillico and Michael Powers

Tamarac Swamp (\$100)

Peter Street
Jeff Soltyssek
Ruth Hauta of Samoset Lodge
Carmelle Girouard
Ted & Grace Price

Muskrat Marsh (\$50)

David and Beth Schnurr
Sheldon and Julia McGregor
Roseanna Rigo and Ray Sweezey
Ian and Victoria Ollers
Saenchiur Flechey

Beaver Pond (Volunteers)

Dr Peter Beckett
Harley Lang
Liz Lang
Angela Martin
Gary Martin
Chuck Miller
Evelyn Eisenhour
Carmelle Girouard
Laurean Corriveau

The Friends would like to thank the many generous supporters.

Thanks too to Dean Lisk of the *Sturgeon Falls Tribune* and Martin Parker of the *North Bay Nugget* for sharing our good news.

A special thanks to TJ and Monique Quesnel of Due North Marketing. They have provided our website free since we set it up and now they have given us our very own domain name www.mashkinonje.com. Today a website is essential and our own domain name makes it easier for people to find us. This allows us to put all our funds into the park.

Thank you for your donations to the silent auction:

T-fal Canada, Woods Canada, Eureka-Johnson Outdoors, Ontario Parks, Ruth Hauta of Samoset Lodge, Harley Lang, Rip and Elaine Drobeck, Bob Wilson, Kevin Cameron of Lakair Lodge, Kathy McManus, Michael Powers and Heather Lillico.

Upcoming Events 2006

Feb. 26, Snowshoe the Heron Trail
May 13 Earth Month Ribbon Cutting
August 20 Picnic and Annual General Meeting

CONTACT US

We hope you enjoyed our newsletter. To view past editions, visit our website or contact us at:

www.mashkinonje.com

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For anyone who wishes to know more about the world that surrounds us, the Mashkinonje Provincial Park is a great place and will remain that way for decades to come. Protecting this area in its natural state is our goal. Your continued support will help us share our wonderful wilderness.

Thank you for being a Friend