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HIGH PARK

A Park Lover's Quarterly

Inside: Shortcutting commuters, 'supercool' insects and reptiles, the Red Paint ancestors of 1921, &, pumping life into Grenadier Pond



photo courtesy postcard collection of Fred Turner

High Park

A Park Lover's Quarterly

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Publisher's Statement

High Park fulfills the personal needs and interests of many people - expansive backyard and playground for those without a patch of green to call their own; a training ground for cyclists and runners; a bird watcher's delight. While the reasons Torontonians flock to the park are many, what they do share in common is an abiding love and concern for the park's wellbeing. This magazine is intended to keep that community abreast of what the future has in store for High Park's 399 acres.

A special thanks to Tom Hazlitt, my parents George and Michele Suhanic, my siblings Liza, Claudia and West, my brothers-in-law Ian and Joseph and sister-in-law Eduarda. Also thanks to Ken Winlaw and David Cerney.

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A welcome bit of fresh air

I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of writing in your new publication. I picked up a few of the copies of past issues made available at the recent High Park Day. The stories on the Black Oak Savannah and Grenadier Pond in particular caught my eye. I am interested in ecological issues and was impressed with the way you explained the scientific evidence in an intelligent, thought-provoking manner. I wish you success in your new venture. Like my walks through the park, your publication is a welcome bit of fresh air.

Lou Smyrlis
Toronto

Memories of 1890's at Grenadier Pond

I am 83 years old, and as a child I spent my summers in a camp at Grenadier Pond, High Park.

Five families – all with homes in the Toronto Junction, where my father had a drug stores at that time – occupied one building, which had one large room to cook and eat in, and con-

tained fold-away beds for sleeping. Attached to this building was a discarded Toronto horse-drawn streetcar, containing a bed for mother and dad, and a bunk built up over their feet for two children.

Each morning my brother and I would go to a huge pile of pure, white sand nearby to see the trails of the turtles who had come up the bank to lay their eggs. At that time the whole park was carpeted with beautiful blue lupines.

My father had a refreshment booth in the park, and was one of Mr. Neilson's first customers for ice cream. Neilson made the ice cream himself in a small building just off Dundas Street opposite to where the streetcar barns were at that time. He also delivered the ice cream himself.

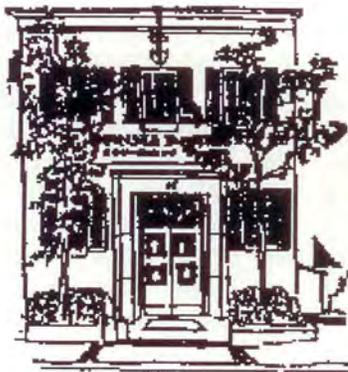
Our drinking water and ice cream were brought across the pond from the waterworks and the icehouse on the Lakeshore Road. Our groceries and other supplies were brought from town on bicycles by the returning workers each night.

Mr. Ellis, the hangman at that time, kept his own kayak type of boat in our boathouse, and spent every day on the pond, fishing; a lonely figure but a good friend. All this was in the 1890s.

Mrs. Norman Cowell
St. Catharines

Editor's note – this account was sent as a letter to the editor to the Toronto Star, possibly in the 1970s.

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Sides square off in sub-division battle

A proposed sub-division on the west shore of Grenadier Pond is temporarily stalled in the starting gate.

Toronto City Council recently postponed, for at least six weeks, hearing an application to divide a four-acre site into six lots. The applicants were expected back at city hall March 2, following a public meeting on the project set for February 13 at the Swansea Community Centre.

Community opposition and opposition from a wider audience is high. "People all over the city consider High Park their park. This is not about naming which trees will be saved. This is a living organism, not a two dimensional piece of paper. You are cutting into the heart and lungs of the city. There can't help but be an environmental impact," says Kristina Guiguet, chair of Environmental Dialogue, a west end group that organized free eco tours in High Park last summer.

Requests for the postponement were made by David Hutcheon, city councillor for Ward 1, and Metro councillor for High Park David Miller.

"My own sense is a deferral would be helpful. The issues we are dealing with are groundbreaking. We are



David Miller

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briefly

attempting to re-write history on how you deal with an environmentally-sensitive area," says Hutcheon. "If I had my druthers I would like to see the city buy the land and attach it to High Park. That may not be an option anymore," Hutcheon says.

Metro Councillor David Miller also pointed to what he considers to be several weak areas in a series of conditions attached to the project by Toronto's Planning and Development Department. Miller says he is concerned with the level of enforceability of conditions intended to protect that area's 'natural heritage' and the 'ravine slopes'. Miller also say, in a letter to the Land Use Committee that a broader public should be consulted since the project has the potential to impact on Grenadier Pond's water quality and the view from the east shore of the pond. "I would like to hear what the people say before making my final decision," Miller says.

The Planning and Development Department in its report says, "This report recommends that Metro (who is responsible for sub-division approval) approve a draft plan of sub-division, subject to a large number of conditions to achieve important planning, environmental and aesthetic goals."

The lawyer for the owner says his client agreed to the conditions for the benefit of the community. "The fundamental concern relates to enforceability. We support those conditions which were designed to address concerns the community expressed," says Gerald Swinkin, solicitor for the property's owner.

Silly geese

The silence is deafening at the duck ponds in High Park. The present serene ambiance is attributable to the absence of a boisterous gaggle of large domestic geese.

The white-barnyard geese, weighing as much as 20 pounds each, are notorious for their highjinks, bobbing and weaving in a cacophonous line up and down the wall of the pond, and harassing those vertical bread boxes known as humans.

Every winter the geese are notable for their absence. Where do they go? It's a short migration to the goose condo — a heated, cement-block building tucked in a corner of the park. This December, parks staff walked the geese up from the ponds, herding them like angry sheep to the condo where they will winter until April.

Zoo attendant Chris Ingram says the birds, properly called Ebden Geese, are hearty, but don't fly very well and are sure game for foxes if the feather heads get caught on the pond when it freezes.

Colborne Lodge 'Thaws-out'

Colborne Lodge holds a series of 'Thaw-out' events in February.

Each Sunday there's a different 'thaw-out' tour for anyone who drops in: Feb. 12 features 19th Century toys, Feb. 19, homemade potato and tomato soups, and Feb. 26, freshly baked breads, scones and johnny cakes. Programmes for children during March Break include hands-on taffy-pulling. For details call 392-6916.

In memory of Chis

There's a new bench in High Park — a beautiful, comfortable bench replete with gracefully curving back and a fine wrought iron frame.

The plaque affixed to this elegant piece of furniture says, "In memory of Chris Jasinski who loved this place as much as you and I brothers and sisters."

Chris Jasinski killed herself last year at the age of 47. Her father Michael says, in his daughter's childhood the park was one of her favourite places, and only a hop, skip and jump from their Westminster home.

David Hutcheon, fledgling councillor for Toronto's Ward 1, sums up his vision of High Park in three short words — "Clean and green".

Hutcheon's ward is home to Toronto's largest urban park. Because of its size, proximity and high use, High Park was a central theme in last November's municipal elections, with all candidates — Hutcheon included — jumping on the enviro-bandwagon.

But with the election over, Hutcheon's tune hasn't changed significantly.

The one-time executive assistant to former Etobicoke Mayor Bruce Sinclair still supports greater restrictions on through traffic in the park, particularly commuter traffic.

"High park should be a pedestrian park, a user's park," Hutcheon says. Hutcheon says he'd stop short of an out-

Oak woodland project 'stupid', councillor says

right ban — there are still some people, like seniors and the physically challenged who need access to the park — but he would consider a permit system greatly restricting traffic.

In conversation dealing with High Park, Hutcheon never fails to mention increasing access to the lake shore. "I want to improve the linkage of the park with the waterfront," he says.

But his primary concern, Hutcheon says is with the quality of water in the park. "The ponds and so forth are very badly polluted. We need to clean out Grenadier Pond," he says.

Hutcheon says his vision of the park is a "multi-use, regional facility". "I want to encourage people to get out and

walk, enjoy the park." One way of doing that he says, is to improve safety in the park. Hutcheon says he would like to see improvements to park signage continue, as well as new and better lighting. But he adds that High Park is still "a lot safer than people feel," and thinks that increased use will make the park safer.

Other High Park items that may cross Hutcheon's desk.

- Mountain bikers — "We need to educate them. They can destroy a lot of the trails and the foliage. Hutcheon suggested specific trails in specific areas.

- Restoration of Black Oak Savannah — I like High Park because of its variety of trees. I don't have any problem with them planting oaks, but I think most people would see it (the restoration) as stupid.

— Ken Winlaw

Miller minds shortcutting commuters

Traffic and a subdivision on Grenadier Pond's west shore will keep Metro Council plenty busy with High Park this political term. Voters in the High Park ward elected a new representative to council in November. Only a few months into the job, David Miller, a 37-year-old lawyer is already working away at one traffic issue in High Park. According to Miller work could begin as early as this spring on the Colborne Lodge Drive link between Lakeshore Blvd., and High Park. Improvements will include narrowing

Colborne Lodge Drive to one lane to accommodate a widened sidewalk and a bicycle lane. There are concerns the narrowing might backlog traffic coming off the Lakeshore onto Queensway Blvd., and into High Park. Before starting work, Metro Transportation Department will test for any possible side-effects by closing one lane on each side of Colborne Lodge Drive. Miller says the project will improve the connection between the Martin Goodman Trail and High Park. The work is expected to cost \$100,000.

Commuter traffic is another transportation issue that needs to be addressed, Miller says. Nine to five workers often use the park as a short cut from the Lakeshore and Queensway Boulevard to Bloor Street and vice versa. "We have

to alter traffic routes so they don't make it conducive to shortcuts,"

A sub-division on the west shore of Grenadier Pond also has Miller on his toes. "It would be ideal not to have any development," he says. "The project shouldn't proceed unless the view is preserved and the bank of the pond protected." Toronto city councillors are now considering the proposal for the sub-division of the 4-acre site into six lots. Should the project pass at council, it will go to Metro government for approval by the commissioner of planning. "The government issue is protection of the environment. The owner's obligation is to satisfy all the concerns." It could be turned into a political issue at Metro Council, Miller says.

— Gigi Suhanic

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Making it work...and work...and work

Community calling \$500,000 shot

by Gigi Suhanic

"Familiarity breeds contempt." It's a well-worn adage that many of us can relate to. Old shoes are formed to our feet but in some places they rub the wrong way. A long-term relationship fits like a glove but the partners resent each others' ticks and twitches. So it is with High Park – the more we travel its 399 acres, the more we notice sore spots where the park doesn't work so well anymore.

Cars, cyclists and rollerbladers clash on the road. Washrooms are perceived to be unsafe. Playground equipment is *passee* and Grenadier Pond is a bleeping mess.

Full-blown solutions to these 'problem-areas' would require a huge injection of cash – exactly what the Department of Parks and Recreation doesn't have. What the department does have is a half-million-dollar budget to test some solutions.

The money comes from something called the Federal Infrastructure Program and is earmarked for improvements to physical structures relating to traffic, safety, lighting and access. "Everybody recognizes it's not a great amount of money. We're trying to do the minimal bits and pieces of construction to test concepts people are talking about," says Barry Hughes, Parks and Rec Manager of Design.

The concepts Hughes is talking about come from discussions with members of the High Park Safety and Recreation, and Transportation Working Groups. "We went through recommendations and produced projects that touched on all the areas people are interested in," Hughes says. Work on some of the projects will begin in the spring or summer of 1995 with the money to be spent by the spring, 1997.

➔ Project 1 - Parkside Playground

The Parkside playground, located in the south-east corner, is considered unsafe and out-of-date. During safety walkabouts in the park women found the playground isolated, because it is located in a depression, and recommended it be well-enough lit to allow for evening use. Women also said the playground was very "traditional". In a recently released study, "The Comprehensive Safety Programme for High Park", author Ksenija Klinger Brezina writes, "Existing children's playgrounds are considered by many users and their families boring and unattractive". "The playground areas are unimaginative and have few amenities which would make a child's or adult's visit more exciting and comfortable." The lion's share of the infrastructure budget – \$150,000 – has been allocated to the playground. According to Hughes new equipment and features will be installed in the spring of 1996. Parks and Rec will use the summer to canvass children and parents at the playground and find out what they like. "It needs to be an area of social play. There's

no environment for the opportunity to interact," Hughes says. Some new playground elements that have been suggested include a demonstration garden, water play and a maze.

➔ Project 2 – The Bloor Street Entrance

In its present incarnation, the Bloor Street entrance at High Park Avenue is designed for cars not people. Complaints about the entrance vary from the lack of sidewalk on the west side of West Road from Bloor Street to the food concession, to commuter drivers hogging parking spots. To make the Bloor entrance more pedestrian-friendly, Parks and Rec proposes to remove 30 parking spaces between the concession and the entrance and construct a sidewalk. The work could happen this spring. Parks and Rec also plans to use the site to test some new pedestrian-scale lighting. According to Hughes, the department expects to hold a lighting competition this summer. Companies are being asked to loan fixtures which will be installed on West Road's west side. Park users will be asked to vote for their favourite fixture. May 1996 is the target date for installing the lighting.

While the work has many practical functions, it's also being done to test the concept of "outer parks". "Outer parks" are based on the notion that there are many people who use the edges of the park and then leave. "According to some of the studies we did people go to the same spot everytime, and this is one of the spots," Hughes says. "They experience the edge and then they leave," he says. It's hoped installing a pathway and lighting will make the area safer and more inviting for those who use it, extending their use and drawing new users into the park. "They deserve some facilities and we need to reinforce how they use the park," Hughes says.

➔ Project 3 – Signage Improvements

A flurry of signage was erected last spring and summer including key maps, directional and restoration test plot signs. Only 50 per cent of the locations were covered. This project is a continuation of that work. Installation is expected to begin in May or June in the south and east areas of the park. Previous to the sign programme there was no information available on the location of facilities or nature trails.

➔ Project 4 – Howard Park TTC Loop

The College streetcar loop in High Park is a lonely place for TTC drivers and for people getting off the car. There are no benches, phones or signs – just a solitary 'Johnny on the spot' for

drivers with bursting bladders. As luck would have it the TTC is planning changes at the stop. In the fall construction begins on a washroom pavilion for the drivers. Parks and Recreation has managed to ride the same wave, convincing the TTC to tag a public washroom onto the building.

The project will also be used to test the theory that single-stalled, uni-sex public, waterclosets may provide the best solution to High Park's washroom, perceived as dirty and unsafe. The High Park Citizens' Safety Work Group has been pushing the concept of single-stalled facilities which it believes will discourage 'inappropriate' uses.

Work is also proposed at the site that would transform the loop into an official stop. The TTC will install a waiting platform, concrete overhang, park maps and public telephones and seating as well as the washroom building. Infrastructure money will be used to install the public washroom.

Howard Park Drive has always been a bit of a teaser for drivers who follow it into the park to a dead end. The road will be properly closed and some of the pavement will be taken up to create a pedestrian pathway from the loop into the park.

➔ **Project 5 – Traffic**

High Park would give a traffic engineer chronic insomnia. There are many places where there is no separation between motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. Add rollerbladers to the equation and conflicts abound. A bicycle lane will be created on the right-hand side of West Road and Colborne Lodge Drive to give cars and



More signs like this information map will be put up this spring.

bicycles their own space. Cars continue to irk many park users. Commuter traffic is something that many would like to clamp down on. Traffic gurus will test a ban on turning into the park during the morning and afternoon rushhours. Stop bars and signage will also be installed to try to slow cars down.

Rather than re-open for the spring thaw, Spring Road will stay closed for all of 1995, as an experiment in reducing cars' sphere of influence. Spring Road is already closed six months of the year.

Project 6 – Grenadier Pond Shoreline Changes



Grenadier Pond's natural shoreline was radically different from what it is today. As part of a pond rehabilitation demo project, 75 metres of concrete wall will be removed at the pond's south-east corner. According to Parks Department staff a wetland and wet meadow will be recreated, based on historic records of the pond. Work could begin as early as April. Labour will be funded by city coffers and a \$35,000 grant from the Great Lakes Cleanup Fund. The majority of the plants to be used will be salvaged from the Altona Forest near Pickering. About four per cent of the infrastructure money will go to construct a boardwalk and lookout for people to walk out into the restored area.

Project 7 — Trail Closings



About five per cent of the \$500,000 will be used to close badly eroded trails and trails going through natural parts of the park. The trails would be blocked with branches and replanted. Work is slated to begin in 1996 and could involve volunteers.



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• Reaching for Grenadier Pond's pristine past •

by Gigi Suhanic

Grenadier Pond is in tatters. A grungy shadow of its pristine past, human development and urban expansion are the cause of the pond's fall from grace. We'll never be able to reclaim some of the natural processes that once invigorated its waters. A chance remains to grab back a bit of the natural world for the pond before it is reduced to a muddy puddle.

A consultant for the Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation has completed a draft rehabilitation plan, that the consultant says if realized would mean a significant change in how the pond looks and how park users interact with it.

In its pre-urban state Grenadier Pond was a marsh of Lake Ontario. The pond's edge was lined with Cattails, Sweet Flag, grasses and shrubs. Painted Turtles laid their eggs on the sandy shores and springs bubbled out of the hillside. Fish, including Salmon, Pike and Largemouth Bass swam into the pond from Lake Ontario through a channel in a sandbar — the only separation between the two bodies of water. Today, a huge strip of fill iced with multiple lanes of speeding cars, has estranged the lake and the pond. A concrete edge embalms the pond. Shy turtles hide.

"Restoring...the pond to the way it was...is not possible given today's urban setting," writes Grenadier Pond consultant Gartner Lee in its rehabilitation plan. "However, those elements... – water, wildlife and connections between the land and water – are still essential components of the pond system today. Rehabilitation or regeneration of each of these components is possible..."

Gartner Lee's rehabilitation plan has been in the making since 1993. An environmental management company, Gartner Lee has worked with the High Park Interim Citizens' Advisory Committee, and the High Park Citizens' Natural Environment Work Group to find out how some park users envision the pond. The groups told Gartner Lee they want to, "establish a natural balance between plants and animals; improve water quality and improve species diversity and habitat diversity". To achieve this Gartner Lee is proposing a number of changes to the pond – wetland development at the south end, barrier plantings on the east shore, sediment treatment and removal and deepening through blasting at the north end. A map of the proposed plan also shows the establishment of a fishing sanctuary zone extending the length of the west shore, the construction of an island in the



photo courtesy Department of Parks and Recreation

Grenadier Pond's north end, long before urbanization. The Gartner Lee draft rehabilitation study calls for the naturalization of part of the pond's shore.

south west corner and a fishing pier lookout at the south end.

While there would still be a trail around the pond and a few spots to fish at, wetland development and barrier plantings would mean less direct access for park users to the pond's shores. "The presence of people in the park has both contributed to the importance of improving this environment as well as contributed to the problems experienced by the pond system. It is necessary in part to reduce the influence of people on the habitats and species in the pond system through restricting access and educating them as to the role they play in the success of this project."

Human priorities have certainly had their way with Grenadier Pond. The first physical alterations to the pond were made over 140 years ago in 1853 when the sandbar separating Lake Ontario and the pond was widened with fill to accommodate the Grand Trunk Railroad. Three decades later more fill was

placed for Lakeshore Road. It wasn't until 1956 that the south shore, said to have been a sedge wetland, was filled to make way for Queensway Boulevard. A scant four years later, the shoreline was treated with concrete on the east from the upper one third to the south west corner.

Urban development also reduced the pond's catchment area by one half. An expanding sewer system, redirected 50 per cent of the surface water that flowed to the pond, to the Humber River. As the sewer system expanded Grenadier Pond became the receiving body of water for five sewer outlets and was the terminus for raw sewage and storm water until 1990 when sewers were separated. According to the Gartner Lee report poor water quality is at the root of the pond's woes. "It soon becomes apparent that the solution to many of the problems in the pond system lies with improvement to water quality and it is here we have placed the greatest emphasis."

Phosphorus, a fertilizer, is one of the top spoilers of water quality, Gartner Lee says. And waterfowl are the main source. It's estimated about 500-plus birds dump 106 kilograms of phosphorus into the pond in one year via their feces. High levels of phosphorus and nitrogen encourage algae to grow. The more algae the lower the water clarity. Algae eventually dies, decays and sinks to the bottom. As it decays it consumes oxygen. Low oxygen levels make about 45 per cent of the pond's deeper water uninhabitable for some species of fish and plants. Canada Geese account for about 300 of the waterfowl counted at the pond. Signs circling the pond ask people not to feed the birds. Habitat change, Gartner Lee says, is the key to pruning the number of birds. Gartner Lee proposes to remove the concrete wall lining the pond's edge and extend the wetland at the south-west corner around the pond's south end and up the east side. Lower scale barrier plantings would line the remaining east shore. The plantings are intended to make the pond a less-attractive habitat for the geese. Abundant lawns in High Park and open access to Grenadier Pond makes it a perfect place for the birds. Gartner Lee predicts changes to the shoreline will send the geese packing.

There are other significant sources of phosphorus. The Clendenan stormwater outfall empties into Wendigo Creek which flows into the north end of Grenadier Pond. It's estimated stormwater contributes another 13 per cent of phosphorus to the pond. The Clendenan outfall is only one of five that empty into the pond and are responsible for some significant contamination. "Collectively, these storm sewers are estimated to account for 56,875 kilograms of suspended solids per year representing 87 per cent of the total loadings to the pond." Levels of iron measured in storm water exceeded Provincial Water Quality Objectives. Fecal coliform, a bacteria found in feces regularly exceeded 100 organisms per millilitres, the limit set by the province. "Values up to 4,000 fecal coliform per 100 millilitres have been recorded in Wendigo Creek. The routinely high levels of fecal coliform in stormwater indicates that it is a major source." A new sedimentation facility has been approved for construction at the north end. The facility would intercept water from the outfall, allow the sediments to settle and then release the water into the pond. Construction is scheduled to begin in the spring of 1996. Gartner Lee predicts the facility would capture 40-50 per cent of sediments. M.M. Dillon, the firm contracted by the city of Toronto to research the project estimates the facility will trap 73 per cent.

Sediment is a common problem throughout the pond

and has several trickle-down effects. It carries in contaminants with it. It is filling in the wetland in the north end. Also, so much of it has built up at the bottom that it is blocking the flow of "relatively" clean ground water into the pond. Several solutions are proposed to deal with sediment. Gartner Lee recommends suctioning some sediment. Dredging could also be used to remove sediments close to the pond's edge. A process called "insitu" is proposed to treat the sediments. Aluminium, calcium hydroxide or calcium nitrate is used to neutralized phosphorus in the sediment. Phosphorus is assimilated by algae. When it dies, and decays at the bottom the phosphorus is bound to the sediment. Oxygen levels drop significantly in the pond in the winter and summer activating the phosphorus, encouraging the growth of more algae. "Calcium nitrate has been used experimentally by Environment Canada on contaminated sediments in Hamilton Harbour..."

Treating the sediments will not make the pond whole again. An agreeable chord will have to be struck between habitat and fish and animal populations to recreate a harmonious balance, the report says.

Only a minute percentage of the original wetland habitat remains. The cattail marsh in the north end has shrunk to one-third of its size. Exposed mudflats, created by sediment build-up, are bare of vegetation. Rock and gravel bottoms at the south end, placed during construction of the Queensway, and one-metre-deep muck on the east shore bottom account for most of the available habitat. There are no logs, overhanging trees or aquatic plants to provide cover and good spawning conditions for fish. Mucky bottoms coincide with areas in the pond where low oxygen levels make the deeper waters uninhabitable for fish.

When Grenadier Pond was still connected to the lake, salmon, sturgeon, suckers and minnows moved freely between the two bodies of water. Large-mouth Bass and Northern Pike, both historically present in the pond were stocked last summer. The carnivorous fish are needed to check a rise in the population of fish that consume algae-eating organisms. Good habitat for bass spawning exists on the west shore. But the bass are threatened by fishing pressures. Pumpkinseed, the pond's most common fish eat bass eggs. A sanctuary zone is proposed for the west shore. Closed seasons until the finish of bass spawning may also be suggested until carnivorous species get up on their fins.

Re-establishing the pike population may prove a taller order. "...The habitat is not suitable for pike spawning and therefore the expectation of their continued presence in the pond is low unless habitat alterations are made." Pike spawn and lay their eggs on matted-down grasses at the flooded edges of ponds. Barrier plantings and wetland expansion will provide the needed vegetation. Grenadier Pond's water levels are controlled by a weir at the south-west corner and remain fairly constant throughout the year. To fluctuate the water levels, Gartner Lee proposes replacing the weir with a stoplog which would raise and lower levels 0.3 metres in the spring and in the winter over an extended period of time.

Like the rest of the pond, bird and animal populations are in a state of disrepair with only glimpses of past glories available. Waterbirds including herons, grebes, rail and terns have been sighted in the pond. Migrating birds continue to use the marshes. Local birdwatchers report a marked decline in the num-

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‘Imagist-at-Large’

Gera Dillon’s impressionistic explorations

by Jill Franklin

Once upon a time, the best climbing tree in Toronto grew in High Park. The stately oak with its broad, low branches was taken down in the late 80s, after being declared ‘unsafe’. Yet it remains in the memories of both children and adults who swung from its welcoming limbs.

Local resident Gera Dillon reawakened that memory when a photograph of the tree appeared on the Christmas card he and his wife sent out this past year. Using images of their hands holding yuletide baubles, and ornamental lights, Dillon merged the former with a slide of the oak, evoking a ghostly longing to undo what was long ago done. Dillon calls this merging process ‘phosis’. His expertise in creating surrealistic slide composites — has earned him the reputation of artistic maverick.

Dillon has been taking pictures in High Park since he moved to Toronto from Quebec in 1981. Last summer he was hired by the Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation to assist in the environmental study of High Park. With his Nikon camera, he is documenting specific habitats during each season.

“Most of the shooting I do in the park is what I call pictorial art,” Dillon says. “Shooting

nature at every level from closeups to the total view of landscapes, including aeriels...sort of micro to macro.”

Before this contract, Dillon says that he tended to take pictures of the smaller, more unusual trees growing in the park — the different maples, cherries, locust, sassafras, maidenhair and Inco trees. But within the context of the study, he has been giving a lot of attention to the park’s sensitive environments, including the Oak Woodlands.

The environmental specialists will analyze his slides and use them as a reference to compare the way things are to the way they are planned to be...or should be. One main focus of improvement is centered on Grenadier Pond. Dillon’s slides will document the natural shoreline in contrast to the manmade, changes in water quality, algae and vegetation, and the villainous population of Canada Geese.

Dillon’s photography in the park hasn’t always been used for scientific purposes. Some of his High Park work has been seen around the world, published in pictorial books depicting scenes of Toronto and Ontario.

His Cibachrome prints appear on the walls in offices of such corporations as IBM, Bell

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Canada and Canadian Pacific. He has also been commissioned to do design print exhibitions for the Royal Ontario Museum, Exhibition Place and the Ontario Science Centre.

Since moving to the area, Dillon has been a recreational participant in High Park, taking along his camera and a variety of lenses while biking, hiking and playing tennis. He finds his greatest inspiration with the fall colours and decay. "In some of my work I see myself as an Impressionist, or at the very least an ephemeral colourist. In a sense it's my way of designing images. I might have been designing wall paper as an apprentice at some point in my past. It's that kind of dealing with colour, that dense kind of detail of colour as pattern. Then sometimes, I work in motion."

After studying astrophysics and advanced mathematics at Concordia University, Dillon's creativity took over and he found himself heading into a career as a photojournalist for the Montreal Star and Canadian Press wire service. He spent three years in Thailand, and there moved from black and white into colour photography, taking pictures of people, landscapes and markets. "Themes began to develop into slide shows. The first was on transportation in Thailand which escalated into six sections, each with a different theme."

Back in Canada, he continued with the slide shows, shooting and co-writing "Metro Perspectives", the 22-minute flagship show at the Metro Toronto Archives. A documentation of the history of Metropolitan Toronto, the images begin in his backyard and work their way into the big picture of the current

situation. He also did another show for the archives, the unscripted three-projector study of the Gardiner Expressway, "Driving into the Future".

With a growing library of images, Dillon began to do surreal composite work. At the slide stage, one photograph is superimposed on top of another. The result depicts planes of reality in 'harmonious conflict' which he intends to be recognized as social commentary. "They may not have any relationship to each other until I create that image. It doesn't matter where or when the shots were taken. They have a universal quality in the way they deal with the human condition."

Over the past few years Dillon has been branching out into video, producing documentaries of the Caribana Festival. Last summer he recorded the public tours of High Park sponsored by Environmental Dialogue. The unedited footage will be used for future projects.

As spring approaches, the last season Dillon will document for the parks department, he will again focus on specific areas as the park comes back to life. But his explorations of High Park will not end there. "Exploration is not just a question of moving one's body through space. That kind of knowledge, that kind of exploratory process the mind goes through, learning about things, educating yourself...it can happen anywhere, but in this case it's the park."

And as Dillon's creative vision expands, it is no wonder that he now refers to his calling as that of 'Imagist-at-Large'.



(Left) Gera Dillon's 1995 Christmas card using 'phosmosed' images including High Park's once-famous oak tree. (Above) High Park, December 1994 for the Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation. Note - all pictures transferred from colour to black and white prints.

The only innocent eyes were mine

“‘A dreidel,’ they shouted in multicultural unison.”

‘Twas the fortnight before Christmas and I was in big trouble. Maybe the sight of shelves full of plutonium-blue candy canes had done me in. Or it could have been the syrupy oozing of Neil Diamond’s “Little Drummer Boy” from every shopping mall and grocery store sound system. Whatever it was (I didn’t quite know the reason), I was Grinch-ishly hating the whole holiday season. And only a few shopping days left in which to buy (I admit) an unconscionable number of gifts. I had to get back in the spirit of the thing in a hurry — but how the dickens to do it?

Dickens — or course! Wasn’t the Toronto Historical Board holding a “Dickens Christmas” at Colborne Lodge? Visions of gracious Victorian customs, of beeswax candles and homemade gifts and real sugarpilums danced in my head. Even better if I could see it through the innocent, wondering eyes of children — a sure cure for Grinchitis. I called the Lodge with Great Expectations. Curatorial assistant Betty Roodhart, obviously doubting my sanity, arranged to match me up with a group of Grade 1 and 2 anklebiters who were scheduled to tour the display. What luck! As it turned out, the only innocent, wondering eyes in the house were probably my own.

The kids were fairly bouncing off the ceiling as they hung up their snowsuits in the cloakroom, and the decibel level was nearing lift-off. Teacherly shushing sounded like fun, and soon the whole group was loudly shushing each other. “She wants you to SHADDUP!” said a small but commanding voice from the back of the pack. They shaddup.

First stop was the master bedroom upstairs, a big, cosy room with monster four-poster feather bed and lots of strange and wonderful Victorian gadgets. Which of these curiosities would they ask about first? Small fingers pointed to the chimney — “Is that where Santa comes down?” Tour guide “just Sandy” agreed that it might be. Next, the ceramic hot-water bottle with the piggy snout rated a chorus of snorts and squeals. But the *piece de resistance* was the tiny box with a winking red light near the ceiling — the kids gathered around for a look at the intruder detector. “There’s lots of burg-a-lar alarms in here,” opined one young expert.

On to the photos of original owner John Howard and his wife Jemima in the upstairs hall. “Is he dead?” they wanted to know. “Is she dead too? Where did they die?”

“Well...here,” the guide admitted. The kids were visibly impressed. “Oooooooo, are there ghosts?”

“No.” Interest slackened immediately, but picked up again at the bottom of the stairs where Sandy showed them the Secret Bathroom. Many people in those days considered indoor plumbing a health hazard, she explained, so the Howards kept their little room a

secret. Much giggling and bathroom humour. The kids all wanted to look inside. Some wanted to linger. A teacher routed the last of the loiterers out of the loo and we proceeded to the summer kitchen.

The aroma of gingerbread wafted from a plate of cookies the guide held aloft. Sudden, intense concentration seized the room — all eyes were on the plate. “Now, I’m going to pass the plate around,” said Sandy, who had obviously done this before, “TAKE THE FIRST ONE THAT YOU TOUCH.” The group’s decibel level dropped as they all began to munch. And to think deep thoughts, apparently. “Is there roaches in here?” piped a little voice from the crowd.

“No,” came the answer.

“No roaches!” said another, in scornful disbelief.

The icebox was explained, to much amused giggling. “And where would you find ice outdoors to put in the box?” asked the guide. “In a skating rink,” they chorused.

The winter kitchen in the basement was less exciting, and the squirming started in earnest, although they liked the big ovens — “big enough to put you into,” I thought I heard one exasperated group chaperone mutter.

Back upstairs, the formal dining room table, spread with goodies for a Christmas tea, got everyone’s vote of approval. The girls liked the tiny marzipan fruit — “Oooooooo they’re so cute.” The news that the fruitcake contained beer started an excited hubbub among the boys. “I love beer,” said one proudly. “My Dad REALLY loves beer,” said another.

The Christmas tree in the parlour was decorated entirely with handmade baubles. The kids, however, were not impressed. An intricately beaded egg ornament was held up for inspection: “Would this take a long time to make?”

“Nooooooo,” they chorused. They were shown a child’s wooden top: “What is this called?”

“A dreidel!” they shouted in multicultural unison. There was some excitement over a jointed paper dancing puppet — a thin man in a black suit — “Oooh, cool, it looks like Michael Jackson.” Then a miniature dollhouse clock prompted an undercurrent of whispered “tick-tocking” that kept on going, and going...They’d reached critical mass, and not a minute too soon — this was the last display room on the tour. The adults hustled to get them dressed and outdoors before the inevitable explosion.

As I walked back through the park to Bloor Street I caught myself humming syrupy seasonal music and plotting gift-shopping strategy. There’s nothing like seeing an old-fashioned Christmas through innocent eyes, I always say, for recharging your holiday batteries.

Insects and reptiles “supercool” to avoid “death by freezing”

by Christine Tu

Most of us are familiar with animal activity in the spring, summer and fall since we can still observe their behaviour. But some may be wondering about those residents of Grenadier Pond that seem to disappear in December only to suddenly materialize during the spring thaw.

Grenadier Pond does not freeze over making a spring resurgence possible for fish, turtles, crayfish, frogs, toads and invertebrates including insects. Temperatures beneath the floating ice-cover usually hover around four degrees celsius, creating a winter refuge.

The body temperatures of fish, reptiles, amphibians and insects are strongly dictated by the thermal climate of their external environment. The effect of declining water temperature on aquatic animals is a gradual lowering of body temperature and metabolism which translates into a general desire to do nothing beyond breathing. Many such organisms become dormant or enter into a state of hibernation.

The winter behaviour of these creatures demonstrates further adaption to surviving the harsh winter environment. Turtles, crayfish, molluscs, and insects in their larval stages bury themselves within the muck at the bottom of the pond, providing some insulation and protection, staying there without food and usually without surfacing throughout the winter. Frogs bury themselves as well but tend to be located just below the waterline. Some fish behaviour is comparable. The pumpkinseeds, bluegills, bass, catfish, white suckers and perch, to some extent, become very sluggish and stay nestled in the bottom of weed beds or burrow into bottom sediments as well. The more active fish, northern pike, black crappie, minnows and carp continue to swim and feed beneath the ice. Their diet consists mainly of the

hardy populations of zooplankton. Aquatic organisms can survive the average Toronto winter, unless of course the entire pond was to freeze, a possibility if oxygen in the water ran out before the ice melted.

“Death by freezing” refers to the solidification of intracellular fluid. To the vast majority of animals, death is imminent. For fresh, warm-water fish, freezing is still the major cause of winter kills. However, insects and reptiles produce chemical antifreezes and are able to “supercool” their body fluids to below the normal freezing point.

The other danger that can threaten the inhabitants of Grenadier, is the risk of exhausting the winter water’s supply of dissolved oxygen. Oxygen depletion is a seasonal problem in Grenadier. Oxygen supplies approach critical lows in the summer and around mid-February. Warm-water fish usually expire after one to three hours without oxygen. Turtles and some insects can last several days to several weeks with little or no oxygen.

Every winter is a question of survival, but considering this year’s mild weather, our aquatic friends aren’t likely to perish because of Old Man Winter — but battling our pollution is another problem.

Fascinating wildlife in winter

by Joan O’Donnell

The natural world is still fascinating at this season. On a mid-winter Toronto Field Naturalists’ walk we noticed a lot of wild animal activity in High Park.

At the outset we heard a flock of

crows making a din that was much too raucous for a mere hawk’s presence, so we headed towards the hubbub. About 14 crows were perched in a clump of conifers beside Spring Road, cawing vociferously and divebombing a hidden victim. A short search pinpointed a Great-horned Owl, perched in a hemlock attempting to ignore the intruders. Since this large owl captures crows at their roosting sites at night, the crows retaliate, harassing it by day.

As we walked south on Spring Road we encountered numbers of tame chickadees. We stood still holding sunflower seeds in our outstretched palms for the birds to land and accept. The White-breasted Nuthatches occasionally follow suit. Near the allotment gardens a Red-tailed Hawk was perched in a tree, and

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Intriguing traces of native burial mound

Discovered in 1921 at Grenadier Pond's north end

by Joan Miles

Among the tangible evidence of pre-modern human habitation in the vicinity of High Park, none is more intriguing than the traces of a native burial mound discovered north of Grenadier Pond in January 1921.

Workmen excavating a roadway connecting Bloor Street with J. A. Harvey's Harcroft Bird Sanctuary, west of High Park, were puzzled by the sight of unfamiliar patches of red sand around the base of an enormous tree stump. Further digging uncovered 8-10 skeletons consisting of skulls, virtually intact, and long bones, in a state of advanced decay, composed in the sitting posture characteristic of Algonquin burial practices. Missing were the small bones of hands and feet. Thirty feet to the north, two

High
Park
in
History

smaller piles of bones were found, likewise buried three feet below the surface. All were covered in a mixture of a reddish-brown powdery substance, later identified as hematite (iron ore), and the local white sand. Exposure to the air caused these carefully preserved fragments of the human anatomy to crumble. A lump of hematite, one copper artifact and a small pierced amulet were the only other 'finds' unearthed.

Who were these early inhabitants of the area, and how did they come to be here?

A possible link with the Red Paint People of Maine appears in *Ten Years of Archaeological Research in the State of Maine*, published in the early 1920s by the late Prof. Moorehead, an eminent archaeologist whose passion was aboriginal burial sites in the United States. His survey of 270 Red Paint burial sites revealed two unique features: the prevalent use of powdered hematite, the source being a natural deposit in central Maine; and the complete absence of artifacts common to other native ossuaries in both the United States and Canada. Moorehead concludes that, "The Red Paint People did not merge with any known culture to the east, the west, the north or the south;...they are absolutely distinct and very ancient". He posits that they are the people the Europeans first encountered in New England, whose descendants are the Algonquins.

The hunting and camping grounds of the Algonquins were on the banks of the St. Lawrence River, extending westward along the northern shore of Lake Ontario. Conceivably, one family ventured farther west than the rest of their people, and in the locale engaged in the time-honoured burial customs of their ancestors.

While the identity of these people frequenting the shores of Grenadier Pond remains a mystery, they, like the Red Paint People selected a prominent, raised part of the landscape in which to place their dead — the high point of one of the great sand hills close to the body of water which, in those days, flowed uninterrupted into Lake Ontario.

Source: 33rd Annual Archaeological Report, 1921-22 by Dr. R.B. Orr (Part of Appendix to the Report of the Minister of Education, Ont.) Courtesy of Archaeology & Heritage Planning, Cultural Programs, Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Recreation.

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Grenadier Pond

Continued from Page 9

ber of marsh birds over the years. Marsh Wren, Swamp Sparrow, Virginia Rail and Sora nested throughout the 1960s but have since disappeared with the decline of the wetlands.

Gartner Lee sighted Painted Turtles, native to the pond, sunning themselves on a log. Red-eared Sliders, the turtle sold in pet stores is also successfully breeding. It is not native to the area and Gartner Lee says it could outcompete the Painted Turtle. Frogs are virtually absent from the pond. Two frog sightings were reported by local community members in 1990 and 1992. Water quality, poor habitat conditions, or elevated chlorine levels may be limiting the number of frogs.

Wetland expansion, sediment treatment are expected to improve habitat and draw wetland dwellers back into the pond.

Winter wildlife

Continued from Page 13

later soared above us in circles, searching for mice below. There are several home-made feeders on the east side of Centre Road near Greenhouse Road. Here there were bluejays, cardinals, and



White-breasted
Nuthatch

an overwintering Golden-crowned Kinglet and Brown Creeper. The latter flies low to the trunk of a tree and slowly spirals upwards hunting for cocoons and dormant insects hidden in ridges in the bark. In contrast, the nuthatch proceeds headfirst down the trunk, finding different insects from that angle. The Downy Woodpecker scours the limbs, while the acrobatic chickadees investigate branches.

Judging by the ubiquitous tracks in the snow, the most common mammals in the park are people, dogs, and squirrels.

The Black Oaks produced a bumper crop of acorns this year and we saw many holes dug under the snow by squirrels retrieving their cache. On cold winter nights squirrels curl up snugly in cavities of tree trunks. As we walked down Deer Pen Road after lunch, someone noticed a BIG BIRD 50 feet up in a tree on the hillside. What an odd perch for a Peacock! When I remarked that foxes had been reported harassing the peacocks last winter, a participant said that he thought he had glimpsed a fox a few minutes before. The new perimeter fence around the zoo is installed and the foxes will be foiled. Now that earthworms and insects are unavailable, the foxes are hunting in the daytime a lot. They catch mice and voles in their runways under the snow. We live close to a fox den and regularly see them chase and sometimes catch and devour squirrels in winter. Fox tracks in snow are two inches across and usually in a dainty single file as opposed to the double tracks of cats and dogs.

Other creatures are present in the park although unseen at this season. Chipmunks are hibernating in their underground burrows during the cold months; but during a mild spell they eat food previously stored near their beds. Skunks put on fat for

Other measures to increase wildlife diversity include the removal of interference by people, predators and non-native species. According to local ornithologists, the decline in bird populations at the north marsh coincided with the extension of the trail up the east shore. Re-directing the trail is being recommended.

Grenadier Pond's rehabilitation is something we can all dip into. At last year's High Park Day wanna-be politicians thronged the pond in the hopes of getting their picture taken while they threw a bucket of bass into the water during a fish-stocking ceremony. More meaningful gestures have been made by the Bloor West Village Body Shop which has started a rehab fund for the pond. Canadian National Sportsmen's Shows donated \$15,000 from its Adopt-A-Pond Program with more coming down the pike.

their winter sleep; males however, will wander on warmer nights. Rabbits are nocturnal in the winter, but their tracks can be seen in fresh snow. They feed on bark, twigs and buds of shrubs. Raccoons become dormant during cold weather when food is scarce, but they too occasionally emerge to hunt for food.

An advertisement for Gate 403 Bar & Grill. On the left, a black silhouette of a man in a suit playing a double bass. To the right is a logo for Gate 403 Bar & Grill, which is a stylized 'V' shape with 'GATE' at the top, '403' in the middle, and 'BAR & GRILL' at the bottom. Below the logo are several text boxes: 'Hot Jazz & Blues', 'Icy Beer', 'Great Food', and 'What more do you need?'. At the bottom of the ad, in a black box, is the address '403 RONCESVALLES AVENUE', the phone number '588-2930', and the phrase 'just across from the Revue Theatre'.

Get the goods on High Park

The (Interim) High Park Citizens'
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