

Spring 1995  
Volume Two, Number One

\$1




# HIGH PARK

*A Park Lover's Quarterly*



*Inside: Who's watching the park; High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee tenders for members; Kicking up dust over mountain bikes; & Bruce walks and talks*

**HIGH PARK**

-  CONCESSIONS
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In High Park at 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.

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## Llama's mysterious maternity

Talk about cooling one's heels in the waiting room. High Park workers and regular zoo-goers alike have been eagerly anticipating the arrival of a bouncing baby llama.

The diminutive beastly was expected in the new year. Well January, February, March and April have rolled by and the manger is bare.

Park staff are still assuming there will be a happy event since the female stopped going into heat following "an observed mating". Predictions are now for a May baby.

Llama births tend to the mysterious. The adults' long hair makes it difficult to see the mother's abdomen. Also the udder doesn't enlarge until after delivery.

If a newborn does in fact appear, don't expect to see it for quite some time. Parks staff say a baby llama was stolen from the zoo a few years ago. This new arrival will be nested away with its mama.

## On a roll

It'll be busy but it won't be like *Cannonball Alley*. No Raquel Welch, for starters.

Starting May 28 and every Sunday after that until Aug. 27, the Canadian Inline and Roller Skating

## briefly

Association is sponsoring a weekly skate-fest from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

The association has acquired a permit from the Parks and Recreation Department and bladers will have free-run of the loop starting at the north end of West Road, south to Grenadier Restaurant and north on Colborne Lodge Drive.

"We want to create a road experience for people who skate recreationally," says Sandy Nimmo a spokesperson for the association.

Nimmo says at this point she is uncertain how many rollerbladers the event will attract.

## Happy Anniversary to the High Park Quarterly

Ooooooh.... Happy Anniversary. Happy Anniversary. Happy Anniversary. Haaappy Anniversary. Happy, happy, happy, happy, happy, anniversary... You get the picture.

The spring issue of *High Park - A Park Lover's Quarterly* marks the publication's first anniversary. And let me tell you, "It ain't been easy".

The response from advertisers, subscribers and those of you who bothered to pick up the magazine reminds us that our toil hath not been in vain.

As a gesture of appreciation to a most supportive local community, *High Park - A Park Lover's Quarterly* is presenting a free slide show of, where else, High Park, Thursday May 25, 6:30 p.m. in the community room at the High Park branch of the Toronto Public Library, 228 Roncesvalles Avenue.

Gera Dillon, westender and professional photographer was contracted in 1994 by the Toronto Department of Parks and Recreation to record the passing of the seasons in the park.

Dillon has choreographed to music a selection of photographs from his archives.

## Spring Road closed to cars

In an effort to reclaim more of the park for use by pedestrians, cyclists, bladers and the like, Spring Road is closed to the almighty car for the next year.

The closure has received all the necessary approvals and a more permanent barrier will be erected were Spring and Centre Roads meet. The decision will be reviewed in a year's time.

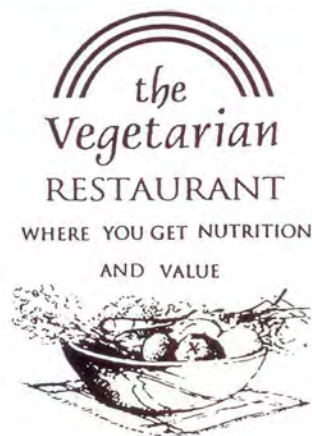
## Straws and lids nixed

Plastic drinks and straws are no longer on the menu at the High Park concession stands and the Grenadier Restaurant.

Signs posted on concession buildings say that due to environmental considerations take-out drinks served in plastic cups will no longer come with a lid and straw.

According to parks staff a lot of the lids and straws are ending up in the ponds. Environmental concerns aside, staff also suspect the lids and straws have been responsible for the deaths of some animals at the zoo.

"It's nothing we can prove but we've had enough incidences that we're concerned. These things can end up in the intestine pretty fast," says a High Park employee. The Metro Zoo has a similar policy regarding plastic straws and lids.



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# •Eyeing a park watch programme

Is volunteer surveillance the necessary and next step in park safety?

by Gigi Suhanic

On the trek from Roncesvalles Avenue to Bloor West Village, I pursue a diagonal trajectory through the park. Up the woodchip trail behind the dream site, past the allotment gardens, and across Colborne Lodge Drive lickety split – I set my internal compass for the shortest route to my destination. So it was the cocoon of my routine was interrupted the day a man exposed his ‘private parts’ to me.

The day was sticky hot and as I clamboured up Centre Road my jeans pulled and clung to my sweating legs. “Best to get off the road and take refuge in the woods,” I thought. A preliminary scan of the woodchip path, now called Spring Creek Trail and coming up on my right showed all clear. I hung a right and my feet sighed with relief from the abrasive concrete.

At two in the afternoon on a smelly September weekday High Park is quiet. I figured I had the place to myself. I felt like the Queen of High Park. I nodded to the daisies and touch-me-nots and tut-tutted to some enquiring squirrels. Chips and twigs snapped beneath my feet. My heart-beat pulsed in my ears. “I was free!”

I felt and heard the little man coming from the opposite direction down the path. Perhaps it was his desperation that willed me to raise my eyes to his. His rodent-like appearance is

etched in my brain. As I looked into his mystified brown eyes, I knew the scene would complete itself before we could both move on. My gaze dropped. His penis hung pathetically out of the zipper of his shorts. What spurred me into action was the faint look of triumph on his vacant mug. Half scared, half angry I spun around and lunged to catch him by the shirt collar. He’s lucky I missed and so was I. He started like a brand had been pressed to his butt and ran, faster than I ever could have, into the forest.

“You’re in trouble. I’m calling the police, you weasel,” I yelled uselessly after him.

Feeling my solitude keenly, I got off the path and back onto the road as quickly as possible and stream-rolled up the hill. I was hellbent on reporting the bastard but beyond that I really didn’t know where I was going. “Maybe the greenhouses, or the training centre,” I thought. I made for all of them, but finally decided on the Grenadier Restaurant. Without a plug nickel I headed straight for Sam Caragianakos, a member of the family that runs the Grenadier. He put me on the phone and I made a report to the police. Meanwhile I described my

attacker to one of Sam’s brothers who jumped in his car and made a search of the park.

Alas, his search was fruitless. The police officer who



*Securing park users’ peace of mind and preserving the solitude and privacy many seek in High Park would be a significant challenge to a surveillance programme*

photo by Diane Chester

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arrived minutes later told me, even if the man was found, the law allowed her to lay charges only when a suspect was caught *in flagrante delicto* – red-handed or in this case red-faced.

Secure in the knowledge that the little \*!#?#@ would live to air his dirty laundry another day, I reset my sense of direction. I may have been knocked off my beaten path but I hadn't been derailed.

As I headed out of the park I reflected that I was able to deal with the situation because I know the park and the people who work there. "Would someone else with less knowledge have reacted similarly or would she have cut out of the place like a scared rabbit?" Probably.

In High Park, when one is frightened or hurt, there is no safety house to go to, no figure of mercy to call to for help and to bandage one's injured sense of security. So maybe Jerry Everson is on the right track with Park Watch Toronto.

Everson, a former nurse's aide at St. Joseph's Hospital, wants to establish a volunteer security programme for Toronto's Parks system with High Park as the site for a pilot project. "I think it's a wonderful thing for people in the victim groups – women, children and the elderly," says Everson. In a proposal, Everson has written that Park Watch Toronto would operate with the "objective of creating and maintaining a safe and friendly environment for all who use the park." As Everson envisages the

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programme, volunteers wearing identifying vests and caps, and trained in CPR and first aid would patrol the park in pairs with cell phones and two-way radios.

"It's the same deal as Block Parents and Neighbourhood Watch," Everson says. He says the patrols would intervene in cases where people are lost, have medical problems, or are victims of crime. Also the patrols would "remind people to be environmentally responsible and help create a safe and friendly atmosphere".

According to Everson his proposal is only a beginning outline for a programme that would undergo some dramatic changes before it started. Everson has been in contact with the kingpins of people who make urban safety their business.

"I think involving citizens gives them a sense of ownership in helping to protect the park," says Carolyn Whitzman, head of Toronto's Safe City Committee. "This is the next step in safety in High Park," she says.

Other Toronto parks are no stranger to citizen surveillance programmes. Davisville ParkWatch has been up and running since April 1992. The Davisville programme is slightly more casual version. It is called "an awareness programme". Parks and Recreation distributes a pamphlet to Davisville residents, "...asking them to be an eye in our park". The pamphlet lists numbers people can call if they see something in the park they don't like, from behaviour considered unacceptable to burned-out street lights.

Tony Di Rollo, a Recreation employee was also involved in setting up a park watch programme in Dovercourt Park to curtail drug trafficking. There people patrolled in pairs and called police contacts when events struck them as off. "We don't want to turn the park into a police state," Di Rollo says. "The community should have a say in how parks are operated and the programming."

Everson was hoping for a summer '95 start up. Due to illness he has had to shelve the project for the time being. Perhaps it's just as well.

His model poses many issues that remain to be resolved. Do park users want a formal patrol system operating in the park? If so how will volunteers be chosen; what would be their areas of jurisdiction; and who would they be accountable to? "The potential for abuse exists," says David McCluskey, High Park Project Co-ordinator with the parks department. "We would have to ensure for an even-handed and fair approach in public park enforcement," McCluskey says.

Some are also concerned that a formal patrol system could be used as a tool to harass gay men who cruise the park and flush them out.

"These kinds of volunteer programmes can attract someone who is frustrated and wants to kick butt," says Jamie Bell, co-chair of the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee. "The park users have to perceive that the volunteers are there to help – they are help figures, not authority figures." Screening candidates would also be a critical aspect of any programme like this, Bell says.

## High Park citizens' committee shoots for broad-based membership

Some might say the High Park Citizens' Advisory Committee is all talk, but the reality is, the committee has influence and after several years of meetings and discussions the talk has born fruit.

Park users may want to sit up and take note of the fact that the committee is on its way to coronation as a permanent advisory group to the Department of Parks and Recreation. Within the next two months Toronto city councillors are expected to approve the details of reporting procedures and the nature of the committee's relationship with the parks department. But most importantly council will finalize membership – who will get to sit on a body that will play an influential role in shaping High Park's future.

The advisory committee was first formed, on what was thought to be an interim basis, in 1993 following the felling of about 200 trees in the park that same year. Twenty members were taken from resident and ratepayers' associations, business associations, sports organizations that function in the park, and others. Also, three sub-committees in safety, transportation and the natural environment

gave those who couldn't sit on the advisory committee, an opportunity to participate in the work.

Since then the committee has involved itself intimately in efforts to rehabilitate all areas of High Park.

On the eve of the committee's graduation from interim to permanent status, three long-standing members of the advisory committee had evolved a formula for membership. The proposed model included a total membership of 15, a little shy of the present headcount, with representatives to be taken from identified constituencies.

Following a meeting with area politicians the membership list has ballooned and is now expected to go as high as 40.

"I would look for broad-based representation. That's better than a clique," says Ward 1 Councillor David Hutcheon. "The most important thing is that the city gets good advice," Hutcheon says.

Sam Caragianakos is a member of the family that has been running the Grenadier Restaurant for the past 14 years. Also, one of the three who refined the terms of reference, Caragianakos says they zeroed in on a lower membership to make the process more manageable. "There has to be some type of limit. You can't let it be open to 100 people,"

Caragianakos says.

If city council approves, membership will probably come from the following five constituencies: residents associations, recreation stakeholders; long-term interest groups; and non-affiliated members at large, meaning residents, not necessarily from the area, with an interest in High Park.

Letters will be sent out to organizations inviting them to chose a representative to sit on the committee. Non-affiliated members will be elected at a public meeting to be run by the advisory committee. According to the terms of reference the selection of non-affiliated members will depend on whether that person has "demonstrated" her interest in High Park; how representative she is of park demographics and whether she can meet the time commitments.

This is the advisory committee's maiden voyage. Until this time it has been a creature of the Parks and Recreation Department. Other long-standing committee members believe the permanent body should strive for the highest degree of openness and accessibility.

"It's very important the spirit be seen as welcoming and open to fresh points of view," says Karen Yukich. "It's really important to build a sense of openness and demonstrate a willingness to get participation."  
– Gigi Suhanic



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# Mountain bike blues

by Paul Rappell

You can see them on the covers of cycling magazines and in the ads: riding ticked-out, state-of-the-art mountain bikes, catching "big air", or screaming through the singletrack. Mountain bikes have stormed the world. At least 80 per cent of bikes sold in North America are mountain bikes. In Europe, home of the road racer, the sales are similar – the dirt clods have taken over.

Aggressive advertising sells. On television, riders blast down trails, ride "on the edge" – paying no regard to considerate, legal riding. Of course, the most popular, most visually appealing mountain bike race is the downhill, where riders, clad in space-age body armour, ride at the limit of control down the side of a mountain, risking life and limb for a place on the podium.

Some riders look no further. They've seen it in print, they emulate it in real life. Like the one I met up the Humber, who'd run his full suspension model into a tree, or the racer who puts chains on his tires and rides the frozen Rouge River, "To improve my bike-handling skills"!

But not all are gonzos.

They don't all ride at breakneck speed, cutting switchbacks and breaking water bars. They don't all disregard wildlife and other trail users. There are those who advocate a kinder, gentler style of riding.

Good manners or not, there is much hand wringing over mountain biking in Toronto's urban parks. In High Park the popular sport is causing much anxiety. "People were phoning and complaining in early spring during the March Break. I got 10 calls a day. They're ruining the paths," says Carol Guy, a Parks and Recreation supervisor for the Western District. With its hilly



and wooded areas, High Park is attractive and challenging to mountain bikers. However, the park's soil is extremely sandy and Guy says it is fragile and unsuited to aggressive off-road riding. Many paths are deeply etched into the sides of slopes. The ground is compacted and without vegetation. Erosion has laid bare the gnarled roots of older trees. During downpours at the end of April when Metro Toronto received buckets of rain, Guy says the soil flowed generously down the damaged slopes. "It's so sad."

"There's significant damage done by mountain bikes," agrees Kristina Guiguet. Guiguet is a commuter cyclist. She is also the co-founder and former chair of Environmental Dialogue whose mandate is to promote the protection and restoration of High Park's Grenadier Pond wetlands and the much disputed Black Oak Savannah. Environmental Dialogue is also the creator and driving force behind High Park Day which it has staged for the

past two years. Guiguet says the thick mountain bike tires grab the earth and spit it up behind them. She also says mountain biking tends to broaden trails. The sport's attraction is not lost on Guiguet. "It tends to be a thing in the moment. We don't tend to take responsibility for the impact from that moment," she says.

High Park isn't the only urban green space crying the blues. Last summer Metro Parks and Property had to close three of its parks to mountain biking: the Rouge, Glendon Forest and Lambton Woods. In December 1994 the department hosted a seminar "Mountain Biking in City Parks". The goal was to bring bikers and environmentalists together to talk about problems and solutions.

Banning the sport in Metro's parks is not an option says

photos by Gigi Subanic



Andrew Colebeck of Metro Parks and Property. Colebeck says local government has to decide where its okay for people to ride off-road.

People want to know where and when to ride. Off-road riders do have an environmental conscience, says Swatty



Trails cut into the slopes just east of Grenadier Pond in High Park have caused devastating erosion.

Wotherspoon, spokesperson for the Ontario Recreational Mountain Biking Alliance (ORMBA).ORMBA produces a pamphlet promoting responsible riding. With only 2,000 members, reaching the scores of bikers out there is a hard row to hoe, Wotherspoon acknowledges.

“By nature cyclists don’t want to join clubs and associations,” says Mike Badyk. Badyk does advocacy on behalf of ORMBA and says the sport and the people who do it are getting a bum rap. “I don’t want to see one group being portrayed as a scape goat for a whole amount of problems,” Badyk says.

Badyk says High Park is too small to accommodate mountain biking considering there are so many other uses going on at the same time. He has trouble buying the ecology line. “As a profession, I teach environmental studies. I don’t think you have pristine nature in High Park. “The move to establish a Black Oak Savannah in High Park is a nice idea. I don’t know if that’s possible and I don’t know if it’s necessarily a wise use resources,” he says.

At the Metro seminar Gary Duke of Duke’s Cycle on Queen Street West told me, “If there’s any park in Metro where mountain bikes shouldn’t be allowed, it’s High Park”. Keep in mind: Duke sells mountain bikes for a living.

In an effort to discourage off-road riding the Parks and Recreation Department is blocking trails with logs and branches. While the tactic is frowned upon by some Guy feels it’s the only option available to her to protect some of the really damaged areas from further harm.

This summer students hired through the Ministry of the Environment’s Environmental Youth Corps programme will take to their bikes and the trails reminding cyclists that off-road riding is *verboten*. Not everyone is aware yet, but a bylaw exists in the park prohibiting off-road cycling. And not just on dirt – cyclists aren’t supposed to be on the paved paths. This comes as news to most riders when they hear it!

For the past three years a working group of the High Park Citizens’ Advisory Committee has studied various traffic plans dealing mainly with the park’s road system. The Transportation Subcommittee has also looked at the trail issue.

The decision, at least for now, is to let the bylaw stand; environmental protection is the key.

While High Park’s fragile environment is the top priority guiding any action taken to control off-road riding, the sport’s impact on the park users’ experience means solutions will have to be found sooner rather than later.

The most common user conflict is with hikers. People feel their turf is being invaded. Careless riding increases the potential for injury. And the fear factor alone of some gonzo guy or gal is intimidating to people just out for a stroll. Of course hikers and bikers are the immediately affected users, but we all are, even indirectly. Walkers who step off the trail to allow bikes through inadvertently widen the trail. Our experience of the park as a natural setting is diminished by perceived or actual conflict between users.

On the Bruce Trail user conflict is a top concern even before environmental damage, according to Jim Wadleigh.

A member of the Bruce Trail Association and an avid mountain biker, Wadleigh chairs an ad hoc committee looking to ease rising tensions between two polarized camps – hikers and bikers.

Continued on Page 11

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# Classroom in the WOODS

by Jill Franklin

Sometimes you don't have to be an expert, in the most formal sense of that word, or an adult to come up with humdinger ideas that could even work! The children of High Park Alternative School have proven that the most beginner of minds can be a source of inspiration.

The High Park Alternative School is really one big classroom in a wing of the Annette Street Public School. With 144 students to attend to, the parent-run school is free to pursue its child-centred and hands-on form of education. For the past year students, teachers and parents have focused the curriculum and learning goals on finding out everything there is to know about High Park.

Focusing the school-year's work on High Park, according to Karyn Morris, was a logical extension of the extensive amount of work other High Park Alternative teachers had previously done with their students. "I believe in showing children they can positively effect things," says Morris, teacher at the school and a specialist in environmental education. "With budget cuts in municipal governments, community stewardship is going that much more important, Morris says.

From junior kindergarten to grade 6, the work is brimming with the empowerment knowledge brings.

The grade 5-6 class was divided into 'expert groups', studying communications, transportation, recreation, human and natural history, oak savannas, wetlands, ravine woodlands and safety. During their months of research, guest speakers including the police from 11 Division, went to the school to give specific information relating to the park. All the students made several field trip where they were given guided tours of the environments, the greenhouse and zoo.

The younger children collected and planted oak acorns, planned a butterfly garden, and worked on projects involving the plants, animals and the native North American history of the park.

The results of their research were presented April 19 and 20 at Colborne Lodge to a fascinated audience of students from visiting schools. Photographs, drawings, charts, relief maps and time-lines were used in mounted displays. Copies of John Howard's handwritten wills were also shown.

The existing problems within the park were shared, followed by proposed solutions that the students had thoughtfully prepared. Some of these were the installation of better lighting in the wooded areas, more washrooms, speed bumps and a fine for owners of fierce dogs running loose. They would like to eliminate cars from the park at all times, and replace the trackless train with a solar-powered electric or natural gas shuttle. Even if cars are still allowed during weekdays, they would like metres installed to deter the commuters who park at the north end.

The students' research efforts and proposed solutions for existing problems are not going unnoticed by government officials, proving that even the 'little people' have a voice in our community. On March 2, they spoke at Toronto City Hall to the Land Use Committee, and are currently planning another presentation to the politicians.

Beginning on June 8, the students of High Park Alternative School will be displaying their work at the Coach House of Colborne Lodge for the public to share in their belief that High Park is an important part of our city – and that everyone can work toward the protection of its natural environment.

In the meantime, the purpose and power of these young citizens cannot be underestimated.

While High Park Alternative students regularly make High Park their classroom, for the students in their audience the two-day extravaganza at Colborne Lodge was a refreshing change of pace. Over 700 grade school children from the Toronto and Scarborough School Boards were brought out of their concrete classrooms for some 'hands-on' education. Many of these children have never had the opportunity to explore and learn from the natural environment that High Park offers.

Seven different workshops were co-ordinated, incorporating different elements of the park. They were taken on a guided nature walk for plant and tree identification, and to observe the effects of a shared human and natural environment. A video on water conservation focused on the changes in Grenadier Pond. The herbal study was a popular event. The students found rosemary, mint and chives growing wild, then experimented with their historical uses in recipes, medicines, air fresheners and bug repellents. They planted their own tiny pot of chives to take home.

The tour through Colborne Lodge taught these young-



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sters how people lived over a century ago, and how they brought their outdoor environment indoors, to use for their survival.

Toronto Historical Board interpreter Brigitte Wranich led the tour of the Regency period home, which had initially been the summer residence of John and Jemima Howard. After their retirement, they left their home in Toronto and lived in Colborne Lodge until they died.

"The biggest fascination for these kids," Wranich says, "is where, when and how the Howards died. They have a hard time believing that all the furniture and dishes they see in the house today, were actually used by the Howards over 100 year ago."

Gathered in the parlour, the students were surprised at how small the chairs were, concluding that all people who lived in the last century must have



*Parks and Recreation employee Terry Fahey talks about native grasses in High Park with students from the High Park Alternative School.*

been smaller than people today. Wranich explained it was just the style of the furniture.

The students were curious to know why the Howards were so important and were told that John Howard had been

a well-known architect whose commissions included the Bank of Upper Canada and the original Queen Street Asylum. Jemima supplied the grace and finesse that he needed to be successful.

Further along the tour, the students had noisy comments to make about one of the first indoor bathrooms in Toronto, but quickly became subdued when they studied the sick room where Jemima Howard was nursed through painful breast cancer and died in 1874. Medicine bottles were on the bedside table, ornate china wash basins holding large sea sponges sat on the dresser. An extra door frame remains from a time when a sound barrier was needed between the sick room and the rest of the house.

Challenged and interested, the kids left smiling at the end of both days. School in a park. What a concept.

photo courtesy High Park Alternative School

## Mountain bikes

Continued from Page 9

"Marauding packs of thugs," is what Wadleigh has heard hikers call bikers.

In a letter to the editor in the spring issue of *Bruce Trail News*, a Bruce trail captain writes: "It would seem that the only alternative to lots of obstructions to impede bikers would be for all hikers to wear a special T-shirt. This shirt would have a number of Goodyear bike tire tread patterns, the colour of mud, running vertically up the back and front. This way, when we are run over, we wouldn't have to immediately go home to change."

"Foot fascists," is what some bikers have called hikers, Wadleigh says. "There's a demonization going on," he says.

John Howard, the founder of High Park, had foresight. He wouldn't have been able to predict that his land would become the favourite haunt of these sprotifs. In his day bicycle technology was barely out of diapers.

Carol Guy doesn't want to make High Park off limits to off-road riders. In fact, restrictions of this nature have proven futile. Proposals for future implementation include improved signage telling riders to stay out, and why. Another proposal: put bike racks at trail entrances to encourage walking. Also, the Toronto City Cycling Committee's Cycling Ambassadors programme could place riders in the park. CAs would help monitor the activities of cyclists in High Park, and could help determine the effectiveness of strategies implemented.

Of course the problem won't go away now or in the near future. If you own a mountain bike and can't get to an area out of town, "Where ya gonna go?" To your nearest park, of course. And who can blame you? "We have a duty to manage parks for

the enjoyment for all of the public," says Andrew Colebeck of Metro Parks and Property. "In an effort to accommodate cycling we have 80 kilometres of paved paths. Mountain biking presents a challenge to respond overnight."

Where in Metro Toronto can a rider find a trail where there will be little or no damage, and no user conflict? (This is one of the tasks coming from the Metro conference.) If we can find it, will riders go there? Would this preserve the areas we want to protect? Would all riders stick to "appropriate trails, or would some seeking greater challenge, cut new ones? Would hikers respect a cyclist-only trail? (Pedestrians and runners clog cyclist-only sections of the Martin Goodman trail and the Humber path everyday.) The solutions raise as many questions as answers, and it's a long haul until the dispute is resolved. But if you see me in High Park, I'll be riding my road bike on the road, and walking on the trails, at least for now. I hope you will too.

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## Bruce is all talk and no bite

"Chicken soup, orange juice, kleenex, no-brainer magazines..." I am delivering a care package for my flu-stricken friend Phoebe. There's a lot of it going around. "If there's anything else I can do..." I say, foolishly. There is, it turns out, something else – could I puleeeez take Bruce to High Park for his walk? Bruce, need I say it, is a dog, apparently the offspring of indiscriminate parents with a hint of Shetland pony thrown into the gene pool. I back toward the door.

Hey, I like dogs – my family had 'em when I was a kid, and I'm sort of an honorary dog-owner now – my Abyssinians are supposed to be the dog-lover's cat (they fetch, they curl up adoringly at your feet, they growl when strangers come to the door). But Bruce, well, there's so much of him, he should have his own time zone.

Not to worry, Phoebe assures me, Bruce is a gentleman and a scholar – he's graduated from doggie charm school. I succumb to his pleading brown eyes, and Bruce and I head out the door for a brisk walk in the park. "Oh, one more thing," calls Phoebe, "he talks."

I take in her feverish brow, her glazed eyes. "Of course he does," I say soothingly. "Shouldn't you go to bed or something?" She goes, and we leave.

Bruce begins to perk up as soon as he sees where we're headed. "Park, park, park!" he says, excitedly. "Now you're talking, Bruce," I say. I have a good chuckle over this. Then I have to decide whether to take the left or right fork in the road.

"Take the right – I want to check out the pond," says a voice beside me. Huh? I look down. Bruce appears to be smiling up at me. Nah, couldn't be. And I was going to take the right anyway.

We're halfway to Grenadier Pond when a squad of manic bike racers zips by, their sinewy drumsticks snapped into skintight Lycra. "Those are delicious," says the voice beside me, "The casing is a bit chewy, but the insides can be very tasty." I look down again – this time I swear I see doggy lips moving.

"But that's if you can catch one," he says a little sadly. "Either they're getting faster every year, or I'm getting slower." Sensible enough. I tell him I know exactly what he means.

We arrive at the grassy slopes near the edge of the pond. A hyperactive Border Collie is performing circus tricks involving its owner and a Frisbee. "I could do that if I wnted, but I choose not to," says Bruce with dignity. The

collie is wearing a red and white cowboy bandana knotted stylishly around its neck. "Fashion victim," sniffs Bruce. "In six months that will look so dated." He sniffs again. The collie's owner and I gaze thoughtfully at the horizon. After some moments the dogs, both thoroughly sniffed, go their separate ways.

Bruce heads for the pond, dragging me with him – he's spotted something exciting. "Ducks, ducks, ducks!" he shouts enthusiastically, but the ducks are not enticed. They swim serenely away. "To be socially snubbed by ducks. Truly, *l'enfer c'est les autres*," mourns Bruce, succumbing to an existential funk. Perhaps there is a Bouvier des Flandre in his family tree. I try to cheer him up.

"Consider the source," I say, "What do you care what they think? Although next time you might tone down your approach." Bruce is instantly eager to try this new non-barking technique. He trots toward the nearest Canada goose – a dyspeptic butterball with feathers – and smiles his most dazzling smile. She lunges for him, hissing, neck and wings outspread, not noticing the honey-glazed, cruller someone has just lobbed in her direction. Bruce notices, however. He leaps into the air like a gazelle, snatches the prize and wolfs it down in one gulp.

"Let the Border Collies eat Frisbees," he says smugly. His mood has turned obnoxiously cheerful. I suggest checking out the hillside, but Bruce points out that it's beginning to cloud over. "Dark, dark, dark!" he says. We turn and head for home.

Phoebe is miraculously improved when we arrive – an afternoon's sleep and mind-altering cold medication have worked wonders. "You were gone for ages – did you have a good time?"

"Absolutely – Bruce was wonderful company! We talked and talked all afternoon."

Phoebe takes in my feverish forehead, my glazed eyes. She pushes a packet of flu medicine into my trembling hand and steers me toward the door. "You'd better get home and tuck yourself into bed before it really hits – go on, get going while you can still walk."

"Walk, walk, walk," urges Bruce. I walk.

by  
Mary Lou  
Kumagai



## Ecosystems, beauty and survival

by David Orsini

Recent articles on the provincially-rare savannas of High Park have focused on the importance of this ecosystem as habitat for certain plant and wildlife species. But the savannah is also an important habitat for humans.

Savannas are found throughout the world. A savannah is a transitional ecosystem – ecotone – between woodland and grassland and contains components of each. It is broadly defined as a plant community containing a discontinuous canopy of tree cover with a ground layer of grasses and wildflowers.

The savannas of the worlds are alike in structure rather than species composition. Their openness is dependent on ongoing disturbances. In the vast savannas of East Africa, where humans are said to have descended from the treetops, some 8 to 13 million years ago, elephants are the key to savannah maintenance. They keep the forest from spreading by uprooting small trees. In North America, fire has been responsible for the maintenance of savannas. Ecologists have only recently discovered that fire was an important landscape management tool of the Amerindians. Fire was used by first nations to drive game, decrease insect populations (i.e. mosquito, blackfly), and to clear land for crop cultivation.

Savannas combine two environmental attributes which appears to have been very important to the evolution of the human species – openness and protection. Jay Appleton, a British geographers, says that there is a benefit to survival in being able to see and not be seen or to see from a secure position. He says that “...a landscape which affords both a good opportunity to see and a good opportunity to hide, is aesthetically more satisfying than one which affords neither...”. Appleton believes that humans subconsciously attribute beauty to environments which are conducive to survival.

In a series of landscape preference studies, Dr. John Falk, discovered that people have a “deep, innate preference” for savannah landscapes, even if they had never experienced one before. He concluded that human beings may have “a genetically transmitted predisposition for the surroundings of the species’ birth and early development”. He believes the popular use of carpeting to be analagous to the savannah’s ground layer.

Whether we give credence to these ideas or not, we cannot deny that so many designed landscapes closely resemble savannas – widely spaced trees in grassland. Savannas are considered to possess one other attribute which is said to be vital to landscape preference – mystery. Landscapes exhibit “mystery”

when they give the impression that there is more information to be gained if one travels deeper into the scene. I think that the present day allure of savannah landscapes is that they possess sufficient mystery and intrigue in a relatively open setting. In this setting people are able to receive sufficient environmental stimulus while still being able to ascertain the presence or absence of elements in their immediate surrounding which they consider threatening.

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# John Howard gentleman-farmed High Park

*Wheat and clover were cultivated*

As early as 1833 John G. Howard, the founder of High Park, mused about buying a country estate and farm as a retreat from the city for himself and his wife Jemima. In 1840, four years after building Colborne Lodge, he hopefully described the extensive lands he had acquired as "a parcel of farmland". However, a decade of demanding professional commitments left him with little leisure to operate his own working farm.

In 1851 he hired a Mr. Wagner to construct a farm cottage and barn close to Howard's Road, now Colborne Lodge Drive, on a level site overlooking Grenadier Pond. A man was hired to oversee the cultivation of wheat and clover. This never became a thriving operation, but rather one of Howard's amateur pursuits.

Two years later Howard took his physician's advice and went on vacation to Britain and France with his wife. He returned with fresh ambitions, among them that of "forming a suburban retreat for professional and business men in the city".

Following his return he advertised lots for sale in three-to five-acre parcels, connected by the carriage drives he had laid out on his estate. This scheme was unsuccessful. In 1857, Howard tried again. This time, he advertised High Park – to be renamed Ontario Park – in lot sizes of five acres or more, with restriction on the use and cost of buildings to be erected, thereby exhibiting a sensitivity to the uniqueness of the setting. This scheme failed too.

In a climate of increasing agitation for public parkland, Howard offered his estate to the city in 1873 with a few binding conditions: one being that Howard continue to live in Colborne Lodge and run his gentleman's farm. An 1874 map shows the farm building cluster occupying 15 acres. When Toronto



by Joan Miles



*Tulip beds in front of the Howards' cottage farm in 1915.*

acquired the farm and field parcel, 40 acres or one quarter of Howard's estate, two years later, it was valued at \$6,000.

The Standing committee on Public Walks and Gardens, the forerunner of today's Department of Parks and Recreation was charged with the care and maintenance of High Park. As the Forest Ranger for the park, Howard worked closely with the committee, for the nominal sum of \$1/year. He cleared the underbrush, surveyed the land, made drains, and laid out Park boundaries. However, the Howards maintained control over the land near Colborne Lodge until their death. They were both avid gardeners, who planted here an astonishing variety of fruit trees, vegetables and flowers. The farm may have languished somewhat, but

Howard proved himself a keen horticulturist. In 1883, he claimed to have identified 10,000 floral specimens! John Howard died in 1890.

By the turn of the century, there were still few structures in High Park: Colborne Lodge and its outbuildings, a boathouse at the south-west end of Grenadier Pond, the east and west pavilions, and the modest farm complex. In 1913, a playground was opened up near the farm. In 1915, beds of tulips were planted in front of the farm cottage, by

now the home of the park's gardener. The barn and other buildings were removed soon afterwards. In 1917 the Hillside slope was graded.

The most dramatic changes to the site occurred in the 1950s. Between 1943 and 1955, Toronto lost 200 acres of park space to public utilities and private demands. This fuelled the resolve of Parks Commissioner George Bell to intensively use the existing parks. The formal garden concept was given full play in the design of Hillside

Gardens, as well as the Hanging and Sunken Gardens. A luxurious office, now the Training Centre, was erected for commissioner Bell, just north of the cottage. The Rose and Rock Gardens were introduced in the 1960s.

The splendid locale of the Howards' farm is evoked by Torontonian Margaret Thorburn, in the early 1950s. "...The water of Grenadier Pond shimmer in the sunlight mirroring the buildings and trees of the opposite shore; seagulls circle overhead; huge spreading oaks add a feeling of solidity and around the superintendent's cottage or earlier days a carefully tended garden adds a riot of colour.

Sources: *Incidents in the Life of John G. Howard*, Copp Clark, 1885; *Toronto Observed*, by William Dendy; *The Globe Magazine*, 1960, Apr.2; *Toronto Parks & Rec.*, & *Toronto Historical Board*.

Photo courtesy City of Toronto Archives.

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