

Will We Have a Legacy?

By Bob Barnett

In Cambodia only a few weeks ago, my wife Anna and I saw a civilization that had been destroyed by invading armies and huge trees which had dismembered intricate carvings, leaving mounds of carved stones in piles like a massive three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle. Imagine thousands of craftsmen labouring for a lifetime to memorialize their emperor/god. And now it is stones, in piles with a few restored gates, walls and reproduction mountains. Ironically, the few real mountains now are being trucked away to build roads and houses, leaving treeless, bald scars.

In Hong Kong, visiting our grandchildren, we saw both 80-storey skyscrapers, massive subway and bridge projects, multi-storey pedestrian concourses and huge swaths of “country” parks. It’s the city of the future.

cent of our land base as parks by 2020. There is no way this objective will be achieved, especially in southern Ontario which has such a high percentage of our rare plants and ecosystems. Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) asked for \$60,000 to help conserve 16 properties in 2015, but only received \$5,000. Ontario has no funding at all. Few foundations support nature conservation, preferring to support social and community services. Meanwhile, both Cambodia and Hong Kong have achieved the global 17 per cent goal. EBC spent about \$100,000 on legal fees and appraisals in 2015 to protect 16 new reserves, but can only get reimbursed for five per cent.

Last night, I heard our board discuss the option of not accepting land donations where the owner cannot also donate the cost of legal fees and appraisals. Imagine not accepting a 175-acre (2/3 sq km) donation with



▲ Tree roots smothering an ancient temple at Angkor Wat, Cambodia. PHOTO BY BOB BARNETT.

ways to raise money, talk to new donors and persuade government and foundations that our legacy here in Ontario will be measured in protected areas. Those protected areas provide health, education and economic benefits well beyond rare species and tourism.

It all boils down to legacy. How many people will remember us and what we did in our lifetime? How many people will not remember

value, but very tangible. The importance of source water protection was featured in *The Globe and Mail* recently. Removing carbon dioxide from the air and storing it in trees and soil may even save our entire way of life. Books have been written on the health benefits, especially for children, of spending time in the woods. Economists say these ecosystem benefits are worth more annually than the one-time purchase value of the land. Conserving land for only five per cent of its worth is a much better bargain. Most land conservation charities are buying the land at market value. We protect donated land for only five per cent of its true value.

At first glance, nature may seem like a cosmetic benefit, but nature will outlast new hospital wings or diagnostic equipment. Nature, protected, will probably outlast our civilization. Just like Angkor Wat in Cambodia, we will be but bricks and stones among the trees.

Bob Barnett's operation went well and as we went to print, he was at home, recovering. Reach him through www.escarpment.ca or 888.815.9575

I write this from my hospital bed in Toronto as I await a multiple bypass after two heart attacks this week

Heart Attacks

I write this from my hospital bed in Toronto as I await a multiple bypass after two heart attacks this week, just after flying back. Spending days in bed without all the details of work flying by has put a few things into perspective.

Southern Ontario is losing 300 acres a day, or 10 sq km a year. It's being gobbled up for roads, gravel pits, suburban bungalows, cottages, shopping malls and industrial “parks.”

Our two senior levels of government have agreed, with 168 other countries, to the international biodiversity initiative to protect 17 per

waterfalls and three rare species for the lack of \$5,000 to pay the lawyer and appraiser.

Being on this ward, waiting for my operation where my heart and lungs will be stopped for hours while the clogged arteries are bypassed, has given me the big picture. Knowing there's a two per cent chance I won't leave the hospital has pushed important things like conservation to the front and small things like money to the back. How hard can it be to raise \$5,000? It reminds me to appreciate the donations coming in every day as I sit in this bed. We need a “can do” outlook that will find new

us by name, but will benefit from the new ideas and things we created during our life?

Only Five Per Cent

I suggest that one of the most cost-effective legacies is protecting our natural heritage. Animals and trees live on, generation after generation. Not only we, but our grandchildren and their grandchildren can visit, see the species and learn things which will improve their lives. Few understand the massive impact nature has on our economic well-being. Cleaner air and water and flood protection are hard to