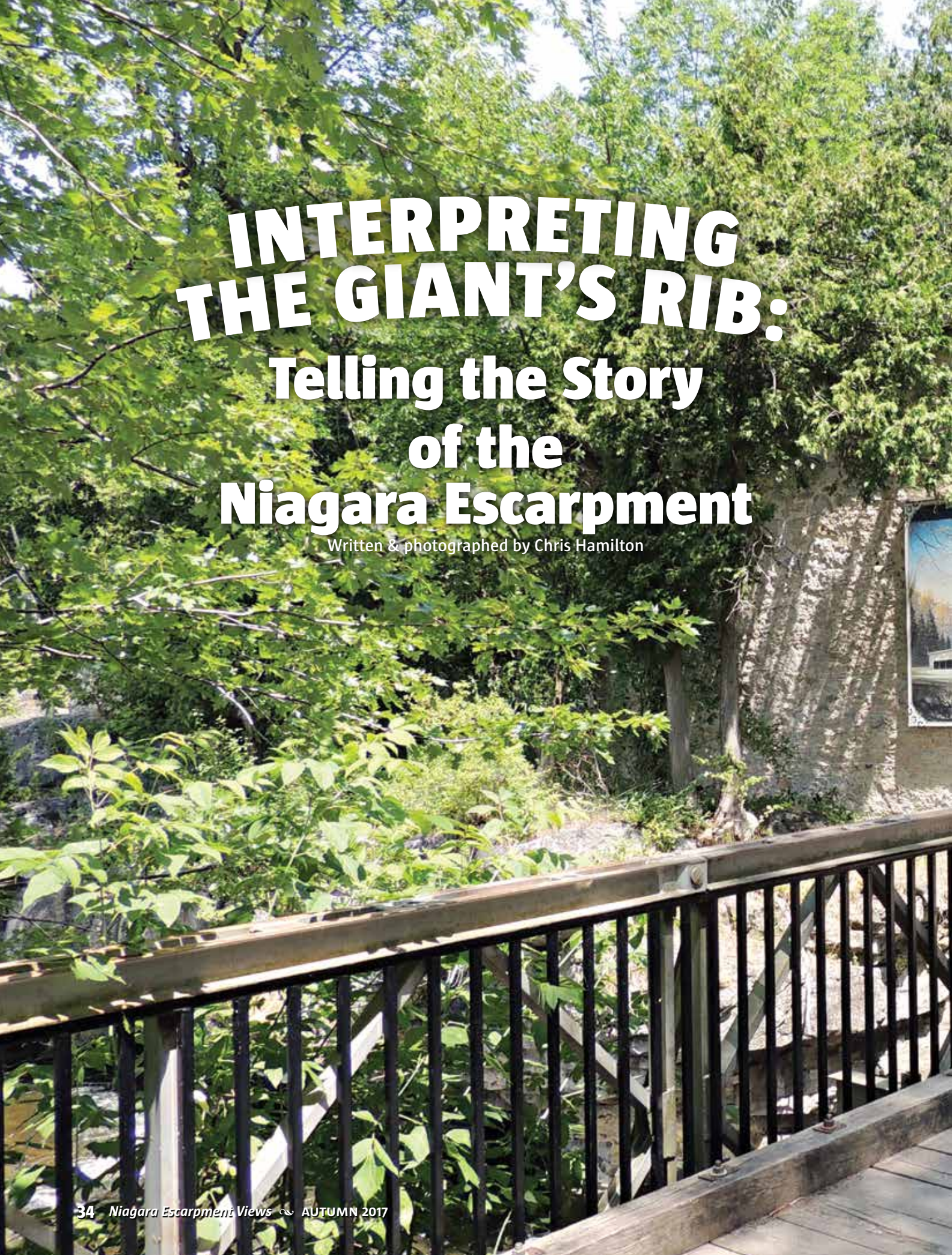
INTERPRETING THE GIANT'S RIB:

Telling the Story of the Niagara Escarpment

Written & photographed by Chris Hamilton



◀ The Escarpment Discovery Centre in Inglis Falls Conservation Area contains displays that inform about several key aspects of the Niagara Escarpment.

Legend tells us North America was once a great giant, and the Niagara Escarpment the remains of its petrified rib. Cascading over a crack in this giant's rib are the rushing waters of Inglis Falls, tumbling 18 metres into the gorge below. Nestled beside the top of the falls, blending into the natural stone of the landscape, is what remains of an 1843 stable: part of a grist mill which produced flour, bran, and feed for animals. Today it serves a much different purpose.

▲ Interpretive panels inside the Escarpment Discovery Centre explain the history, geology, ecology of and human influence on the Niagara Escarpment.

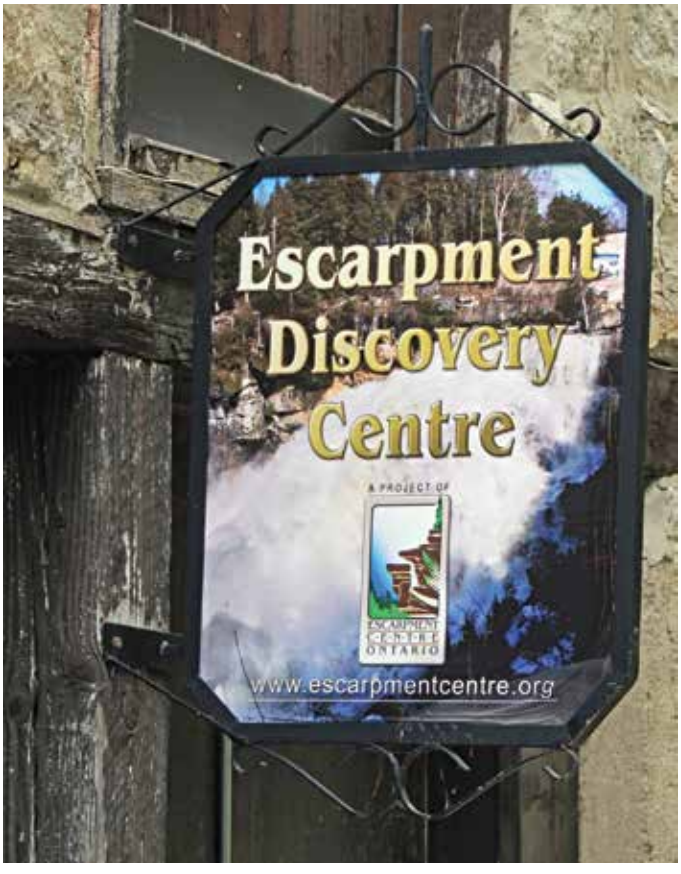
In Owen Sound's Inglis Falls Conservation Area, at the head of the falls and along the Bruce Trail, you can step through the doors of the old stable: now the Escarpment Discovery Centre. Inside you can return to the dawn of time and see how the Escarpment was formed of the ancient seas of old. See how it was shaped by glaciers and discover its present-day natural wonders.

The interpretive panels on display tell the story of the Niagara Escarpment, in a flowing spectrum of stories and images entitled Ancient Sea and Fossils, Geological Formation, Glaciation, Ecology, Ontario's Greenbelt, The Bruce Trail, The Man and the Biosphere Program, and The Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System. These panels are accompanied by display cases where you can see fossils of actual creatures who lived here nearly half a billion years ago.

These panels were developed by Giant's Rib Escarpment Education Network (GREEN) as part of a plan to take all the resources of their Discovery Centre in the Dundas Valley and streamline them into an easy-to-read visual storyline of this giant's rib which could be duplicated and shared in a consistent way all along the Escarpment. The purpose was to take this information to as many locations as

▶ One of the fossils of animals that used to exist on the Niagara Escarpment: a Nautiloid fossil of a soft-shelled Cephalopod.

▲ Breathtaking Inglis Falls cascades down 18 metres from the Escarpment Discovery Centre.



◄ When near Owen Sound, learn all about the Niagara Escarpment here.

possible in order to provide visitors to and residents of the Escarpment a perspective of appreciation for the marvels which surround them.

GREEN president Jennifer McPherson explains "In this digital age, these panels give the viewer a more powerful understanding of how the Escarpment was formed and the ways in which we use and enjoy it today. Through this broader understanding, we hope to engender a feeling of respect for this UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve and ideally, a sense of pride to protect it."

In 2015, GREEN revamped its Dundas Centre, its website, its fossil displays and developed a portable display, a resource that can be loaned out to other "Escarpment-minded" partners. Following this, the Dundas Discovery Centre had its most successful year ever. Yet even with that, only about 6,000 visitors are reached each year.

New Centres

Seeking new locations, GREEN contacted Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA). Together they worked to revamp the Escarpment Discovery Centre at Inglis Falls. A new display cabinet was installed thanks to a donation from the Friends of Hullett Marsh, as were four interpretive panels. Thanks to a donation from Peter Kelly, who famously worked on dating the ancient cedars on the Escarpment, core samples from cedars at Inglis Falls and equipment used in the process have also been on display.

Krista McKee, GSCA's community relations coordinator says, "Inglis Falls welcomes over 30,000 visitors each year that marvel at the view of the falls. During their visit they explore other geological features, such as the potholes, and historical facts of the area. When we were contacted by GREEN, we were thrilled to be part of the network educating visitors with their display material."

Cabot Head became the next location for interpretive panels in early 2016. This historic site, in view of three prominent Escarpment bluffs, was a perfect spot. The Friends of Cabot Head (FOCH) and GREEN placed interpretive panels on the trails near the lighthouse, this time reworked with a local focus to the information. Panels let visitors know what features they can see in the immediate area.

From one panel you get

▲ Caitlyn Buhay, left, and Jenn Wilson in the improved Discovery Centre in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area Trail Centre.

◀ Far right, Milt McIver, mayor of Northern Bruce Peninsula, joins volunteers with GREEN and FOCH at Cabot Head Lighthouse to unveil the new interpretive plaques.

a view of the Wingfield Basin, the three nearby bluffs, and even the remains of a shipwreck. From another along the Georgian Bay shoreline one can discover fossils merely a few steps away. The third is located prominently by the lighthouse.

Helen Fry, past president of FOCH, notes "FOCH was so delighted that it was all in place for our most successful season ever with about 18,500 to the site in 2016. The panels are ideally located for visitors to feel present in the ecology and uniqueness of the ecosystem. The interpretive panels have given visitors practical, tangible information and evidence for what is right there before their eyes - aspects to discuss, point out to one another, and look out for. They have raised visitor awareness of the majesty and fragility of where they stand."

The panels at Dundas and Owen Sound remain accessible but the panels at Cabot Head have been unseen in 2017 due to the temporary closure of the site.

Cabot Head Panels

The Ministry of Fisheries and Oceans, which owns the site, conducted an environmental study and discovered a health

▲ West Bluff is one of the beautiful Escarpment formations that are visible at Cabot Head.

◀ This new interpretive panel on a Cabot Head trail tells of ancient seas in the area and is located close to fossils visible today.

risk. At the time of writing this article, the FOCH website stated "FOCH does not know the cause of concern, but was advised against having people stay at the lighthouse. Until more is known, FOCH will not allow any level of risk, so the entire site is closed."

Visitors will have to wait until the 2018 season at the earliest to enjoy the trails and interpretive information which provide some wondrous context. The FOCH are staying positive and have spent the season regrouping and performing some much needed site maintenance.

Both FOCH and GREEN have incurred significant losses to their volunteer boards, even though both are coming off their most successful years. The enlightenment and education of visitors to our Niagara Escarpment is largely enhanced and sometimes solely handled by volunteer groups like FOCH and GREEN. This story is an example of what volunteers can accomplish in a short time, but also how important volunteers are to such organizations... because there are plenty more cracks along the Rib.

Contact FOCH through cabothead.ca or GREEN at giantsrib.ca. **NEV**

Chris Hamilton *wrote "Miraculous, Timid Turkey Vultures" for Summer 2011 when this magazine was known as* Escarpment Views. *He specializes in video production, photography, writing, design and lectures on Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve topics, and has a Facebook page: vulturesrcool.*

▼ GREEN developed this portable display of Niagara Escarpment information that is available for loan to interested groups.