

Our LaCloche Mountain Legacy

Written & photographed by Bob Barnett

Do you have an iconic place? For me, the height of the LaCloche Mountains on the way to Manitoulin from Espanola is just that. Where you first see the Island, Highway 6 climbs way up, then there's the spectacular view of that white mountain and the lakes below. Now we're trying to buy it from Vale so thousands of people can get out of their cars and climb to the top.

The route to the summit is a challenge. You pretty much have to plan each step, but it's not climbing. You just need a good grip on your shoes to handle the angle of the rock. The surfaces are ground smooth by millennia of glaciers. A few trees grow in cracks and stand stark against the sky. As you get higher, glimpses of lakes make you want to get to the top. Finally, the foundations of an old fire tower announce that this is the highest place where rangers watched 30 km in each direction. The rounded top lets you wander around for a 360-degree view to Manitoulin, Georgian Bay, the North Channel and over Charlton and Frood Lakes.

Group of Seven

It's no wonder the Group of Seven chose this very peak to paint the view so often. Then there are all the paintings of the mountain from various angles, usually with the lakes in the foreground. Franklin Carmichael had a camp on Charlton Lake and invited his friends up to paint. The various Group of Seven paintings, now worth millions, are safe, most in museums. Now we have a once-only chance to protect a mountain that inspired them.

INCO bought this land

years ago and has extracted silica from the nearby Lawson Quarry to smelt nickel. INCO sold to Vale and, fortunately, Vale has declared this mountain surplus. Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) has offered \$158,000 for the 235 acres. Now we have to find the money for the land and associated costs. Our members have been very generous so far; we've raised 10 per cent of the money in the first month. There is a long way to go, but we'll get there with the help of old and new supporters and local residents.

Not only is this a great piece of scenery, but you can help us protect 3.5 billion-year-old mountains once as high as the Rockies and one of the oldest mountain ranges on Earth. We have 12 rare species recorded here including Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Cougar, three turtles and three more birds. These are the same Killarney features protected by Ontario Parks and First Nations almost all the way to Blind River. This is one of only two properties now needed to close the only gap in that long band of conservation. Our effort to close the gap started nine years ago when we worked with the Red Deer Village Association to accept their 52-acre trail corridor, and the third-last missing property about three km west of Willisville Mountain. Let's protect the whole thing!

We feel strongly that people will make this a highly visited nature reserve. Our Cup and Saucer, far from Highway 6, is visited by more than 10,000 people a year: likely the top tourist attraction on Manitoulin and certainly one of the top 10 sites in northern Ontario. I forecast that even more people will stop here.... for the exercise....for the

view....for the right to say they got to the top. **But we have to buy it first.** And for that we need your help. You can help us protect a signature part of Ontario. Your acre costs \$700. After your tax savings that's only \$420. And your gift will last for more than the seven generations our First Nations consider when making decisions.

Why This Land

Why is EBC interested in buying this property? EBC's mandate is to create nature reserves in the area of the Niagara Escarpment. Few realize that the Escarpment

is not just the sloped bit at the edge of the ancient sea but the entire ecosystem out to Lake Huron, thus including all of the Bruce Peninsula and Manitoulin Island. The delimiter of the ancient sea was the much older LaCloche Mountains which forced the edge of the sea and the Escarpment to turn west. Protecting an Escarpment buffer zone, especially such a significant one, is a bull's eye for us.

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▼ Looking south from the summit of Willisville Mountain to Lawson Quarry in the middle distance, then Bay of Islands and toward the Niagara Escarpment.

