

# One Gift, Many Benefits

By Bob Barnett

**W**illisville Mountain is now a nature reserve!

Our donors made it happen without a penny of government funding. We can clamber up to the top for that spectacular view any time. You can see for 30 km in every direction from just where the Group of Seven sat and sketched almost 100 years ago. The remnants of the 2.5 billion-year-old La Cloche silica and quartz mountains are protected in perpetuity to add to the chain of provincial parks and First Nations like Whitefish Falls, Sagamok and Serpent River stretching 120 km from Killarney as far as the town of Spragge.

The “Escarpment” in our name suggests the backbone for our work which extends to cover the broader ecological corridor to the Lake Huron shore. Just north of Willisville is the west entrance to

Killarney Park and just south is “Sunshine Alley,” the protected route the voyageurs took to the prairies when that was the only way to get there before the railway.

Protecting nature is not just a matter of protecting a patch of land within the property boundaries and the species living there, breeding there or passing through. There is no doubt that we need to protect those species, especially if they’re rare, endangered or threatened. We must also look at the full range of services the land provides. The trees are sequestering carbon, the soil is storing carbon for generations, the wetlands are slowing down water to prevent floods and filter out impurities, the trees remove particulate from the air and provide oxygen.

We think of the land as being a place to visit. Yes, it helps by proving tourism assets like walking trails, views and sometimes climbing or hunting. Those amount to

almost two billion dollars a year in the Greenbelt alone.....which is just a fraction of Ontario south of the Pre-Cambrian Shield where nature, if left alone, provides \$85 billion dollars a year of services. Those benefits disappear when the land is paved for roads or parking lots or houses are built. The grass in the front and back yards provide negligible benefits compared to “nature.” The roads just bring more pollution and CO2 from tailpipes.

## Enlightened Alan Shaw

Some people, like Alan Shaw, get the picture. Protecting nature is part of their DNA. Alan was born in his house in the Earls court district of Toronto. He was a gunner and radio operator during WW2. His Mom gave him the house in 1946. He fought for the use of seat belts long before their use was recognized as essential. He fought against

smoking and for public transit. He was one of the first to come out and build the Bruce Trail..... all the way from the section he maintained near Speyside, right up to Tobermory.

From his bed in Sunnybrook’s Veteran’s Wing he’d tell me about his plans to repair the Scarborough Bluffs and ask about the Silver Maple on his lawn. He knew that trees and nature are good for people long before studies

began to arrive proving that we heal faster in nature and long before doctors started to prescribe time in nature to prevent disease.

Al saw everything from his bicycle seat vantage point. He pedalled 50 km out to maintain the Bruce Trail near Milton and back when he wasn’t working as a postal worker or heading out by bike to Florida or across Europe. Al died in December at the age of 97. He left his estate to Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy and the Bruce Trail.

He knew this was the best way to protect the land he loved. He knew that by protecting land he was providing a place for people to be well and for nature to give us its ecological rewards.

We are grateful for Al’s support. It allowed us to protect Willisville Mountain and it will protect many more properties. His bequest alone will allow us to protect almost 100 donated properties, maybe 5,000 acres or 20 square km. We could buy two Willisville Mountains with his gift or it would allow us to buy the two properties with 1.8 km of the Bruce Trail that we are working on right now. Those properties will hold off global warming by sequestering carbon and help local municipalities build their tourism economies. The more people it keeps out of hospitals, off pills and becoming more fit, the better.

Al’s gift will have a long chain of benefits, far beyond the money and the land itself.

*Reach Bob Barnett of Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy through [www.escarpment.ca](http://www.escarpment.ca) or 888.815.9575.*



Willisville Mountain from Frood Lake near the Group of Seven’s Franklin Carmichael’s cabin. PHOTO BY CATHERINE LAKE.