

Protecting Heaven's Gate

By Bob Barnett

I just got home after a long walk in the rain and my friend Susan phoned to offer Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) a \$20,000 gift toward the protection of the spectacular Heaven's Gate property. Roy and Cathy Jeffery of Manitoulin Island are matching that to bring us \$40,000 closer to our \$1,700,000 goal. That's a huge step forward! Heaven's Gate is part of the LaCloche Ridge, just west of famous Killarney Park. Our new reserve is only a few km north of the Escarpment near Little Current on Manitoulin. Great Cloche Island is escarpment alvar, then igneous rocks rise steeply up to LaCloche Ridge with the famous silica/quartz that stopped the inland sea which

formed the Escarpment four hundred million years ago.

Three crystalline "mountains" and two turquoise lakes form the start of the Heaven's Gate Trail. 2,000 acres of bald outcrops will join three EBC reserves to the LaCloche Ridge Provincial Nature Reserve and LaCloche Provincial Park to the west and through Whitefish River First Nation to Killarney Provincial Park to the east. This 80 km of continuous quartzite hills so inspired the Group of Seven that they, in turn, convinced Canadians our north was so iconic 100 years ago.

Unprecedented Support

This project to protect eight square km has stirred enthusiasm unprecedented in our 23-year history. Hundreds of people have seen the pictures and chipped in with

big and small gifts. With Ted Cowan as our spokesman, Bay of Islands supporters north of Manitoulin stepped forward to ensure it remains their pristine horizon.

I came in from shovelling snow to get a phone call from Kay and Derek Coleman who donated \$200,000 in shares toward our goal. As owners of a neighbouring property, they want to ensure our natural heritage is safe. These silica-rich vistas contain the special ingredient required for smelting at Copper Cliff. Derek's book, *La Cloche Country - Its History, Art and People*, describes the gold and copper mines which were started right here on Heaven's Gate. Fortunately, miners only found a few thousand ounces.. not enough for a viable mine in the 21st century. That has allowed us to buy what were called the

Wallace Mine Locations.

I am encouraged that our suggestion about protecting this property has been embraced so enthusiastically. For 23 years we've been trying to unlock what inspires people. I've pictured myself as a barker outside the circus tent encouraging passers-by to hear about ecological services, rare species, carbon sequestration and all the health that time in nature brings. We've had a hard core of attendees, but the tent has only been partly full. A lot of people were scared off by talk of biodiversity or doubts that protecting nature was a top priority. With Heaven's Gate as the prime act, the tent is now suddenly full and the audience is clapping. With your help, EBC has reached a whole new plateau as a land protector.

New Nature Reserve

Our new Heaven's Gate Nature Reserve will remain a living, breathing reason for hope for the future of this planet. Thank you to all of the individuals, foundations and corporations that helped. Special thanks to the Jeffery family who matched those donations and offered us a loan to complete the project. Thank you to Gary Albrecht and his family, who had a cottage at McGregor Bay, protecting the property for 20 years and who allowed us to continue that legacy.

Victory! We acquired this amazing property on April 28. See the pictures and video at escarpment.ca. We are working on 40 more projects and hope to keep up the pace of protecting a property a month. Every donation helps us protect more land.

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An inspiration to the Group of Seven, Mount Ararat will be protected as part of Heaven's Gate Nature Reserve.
PHOTO BY TODD CLEMENT.