

Michael's Bay on Manitoulin Now Protected

Written & photographed
by Bob Barnett

Many years ago, a concerned Manitouliner took me to Michael's Bay, 10 km west of the South Baymouth ferry dock, to explain why the old town site and cemeteries at the Bay needed to be protected. This had been the first big settlement on the Island and was now a ghost town of foundations and overgrown headstones. The land was tied up in international litigation and assertions about money laundering and visited only by fishermen.

On May 12, 2021, Chris Bousquet of Bousquet Realty in Little Current, told me the land had been listed for \$665,000. I told several board members of Escarpment

had just been sold to the Michael's Bay Historical Society. It had two full km of the Manitou River and a share of the successional beach ridges which make Blue Jay Creek Provincial Park an ecological treasure. Not only that, it provided land access to the Park itself, one of the few Ontario parks you could only reach by water.

Two days later, the bomb dropped. I heard that the property was being sold by Canada's Seized Asset Office and tenders were being opened in just three days! I started the chain of EBC board approvals but the executive decided we should inspect the property before we could put in an offer. I phoned our appraiser, Hal Love, and asked EBC's conservation coordinator Liv Callo, if she wanted to leave

Rare Features

What a huge property! On Saturday we checked out the Manitou River and the wetlands east of the river. Neighbour Al MacNevin was kind enough to show us the southern part by golf cart. Meanwhile the board was making progress approving a conditional offer. On Sunday, friends took us across the Manitou by boat where we inspected the beach ridges, the intervening wetlands, rare thistles and a km of white sandy beach. We hiked up through the Park, across the property and down to the shore again where our friends ferried us back to the car. We took lots of pictures. After our second six-hour drive, we got back to Toronto.

Monday was frenetic, but we got the \$32,500 deposit to Chris, our agent, and our executive signed the offer for the asking price, but conditional on confirmation of appraised value and time to fundraise.

Nail Biting

Then began the wait. We heard there were four offers besides ours. We heard developers were interested. We chatted with the folks at the Crown office to ensure they knew that EBC was a charity, how ecologically

significant the property was and how important it was to provide public access to the Park. Weeks went by. We got confirmation of value from Hal. Nail biting time...

Then Chris phoned to say

our offer had been accepted. We were obviously overjoyed, but, well... we had to find the money. A donor stepped up and assured us of some of the funds. Liv wrote a grant request to the Ontario Land Trust Alliance for provincial funding. We knew we had tentatively been approved for funding from a second source. We postponed closing, hoping the tentative funding would firm up since we couldn't complete the deal without it. Then in June we got approval.

Finally, late on September 17, we closed the deal... The river, beach ridges, shoreline and rare species were safe

More Land Protected

A sidebar to this story is that we heard about a 300-acre property with a hunt camp adjoining both Michael's Bay and Blue Jay Creek Park. We offered \$229,000 and the offer was accepted in August. After closing in November, we have 686 acres protected beside the 600-acre provincial park.

Another footnote: on September 30 we added 200 acres to our 300-acre reserve on the shore at Timber Bay, about five km west of Michael's Bay.

Now it's over to you. We still need to replace the funds in the bank so we can repeat this success again and again. We've just had an offer of 50 per cent funding, so your donation goes twice as far. For information on how you can become a supporter, see escarpment.ca or call me at 888.815.9575.

Come to Manitoulin and check out our new gateway to the old town and the provincial park!

Bob Barnett is executive director of Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy.



▲ At Michael's Bay on Manitoulin, a 486-acre property with a great deal of ecologically important shoreline, is now protected.

Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) and one big donor how important this property was: 486 acres with a great deal of shoreline; virtually surrounding the old town site and cemeteries which

for Manitoulin right after work. She said yes, my wife agreed I had no other pressing commitments, so we jumped in the car and headed for Sudbury and EBC's cottage at Freer Point on the north shore.