

Awinter wander through the Bruce Trail Conservancy's Kemble properties is a fascinating journey through geological, ecological, and cultural time. From tropical sea sediments to glacial remnants to pioneer homesteads, this land has witnessed constant change through the millennia. Today there are protected nature reserves showcasing the Niagara Escarpment, and offering a variety of trails and ecosystems to explore and appreciate.



KEMBLE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE
1897 - 2007
OLDEST ACTIVE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE IN THE WORLD



In the winter of 1897, Mrs. Clara Gardner invited six her home and brought with her to her home in Kettle, Ontario, three Kettle and Lake Charles to visit rural women to unite and form a Women's Institute based on the original Wesleyan Convention. She felt it would be a boon for local women to meet monthly to discuss homemaking problems and exchange ideas. Her motto was "busy work is time well spent, but women's work is never done" and "if you know a good thing, pass it on".

In early September, twenty-three founding members met in the Library Hall to form the first Women's Institute in the World. Clara Gardner was first President for the first two years, helped organize other Institutes in Levy County, and served as first President of the Levy County Federation Women's Institute in 1907 and 1908. Clara Gardner was an outstanding public spirited woman, one from the same class as the famous Levy County woman - Agnes MacPhail, Canada's first female Member of Parliament and Nellie McClung, world woman's rights activist.

Today the Women's Institute has over 200 branches in Ontario, they offer quality education and support programs, advocating social and economic changes, and working towards the personal growth and empowerment of all women. Queen Elizabeth, a member of the Metropolitan Branch, is one of 5,000,000 members worldwide.

To celebrate the 110th anniversary of the Kettle Women's Institute, now the oldest active Women's Institute in the World, a fitting tribute has been planned in living memory of our founders, the pioneer members and all members who have passed on.

The table is set. Come on & ponder of our Kettle Women's past, present and future making a better tomorrow for all.

DEDICATED THE DAY, Monday September 12th, 1997
BY
LARRY MILLER, M.P.
BRUCE - GREE - OWEN COUNTY

BUILDING STRONG FAMILIES
& STRONG COMMUNITIES



▲ A large old apple tree and lilac bushes mark the home site of James and Martha West's family.

Our adventure begins with a scenic drive north on Grey Road 1 out of Owen Sound. At the curve where Dawson Road meets Road 1, be sure to check out the Kemble Women's Institute Lookout. This tasty-looking tea service sculpture of rock and concrete was installed in 2007 to commemorate the 110th anniversary of Kemble Women's Institute, the oldest active Women's Institute in the world. The monument and story of Kemble's historic Women's Institute pay tribute to the hearty women and men who settled this rugged landscape.

Continue north, straight through Kemble, on Kemble Rock Road. Ahead rises the mass of Kemble Mountain towering over the surrounding fields.

We enter the Kemble Rock Nature Reserve on the blue-blazed Don Richards Side Trail. Depending on snow and trail conditions, we may walk, snowshoe or ski this route. The trail winds through abandoned farm fields towards a small stream. This farm belonged to James and Martha West who settled here in 1903. When James died young, Martha and six children continued to work the farm. Their apple trees, honeysuckle, and lilacs mark the house site on our left. The barn foundation walls are visible on our right. The cedar rail fences and livestock corrals are from more recent farming. At the creek, an old watering trough has been repurposed as a bridge abutment.

Ahead and on our right, the Escarpment rises by rocky steps and cliffs. The

ledges are festooned with icicles, snow, and mosses. We climb through scrubby growth that is reclaiming old farm fields, and pass into beautiful hardwood forest. Here Indigenous peoples and White settlers after them tapped the Sugar Maples for sweet syrup production. Soon we pass a side trail on the right but continue on to the Kemble Wetland Side Trail.

Kemble Wetland

We begin our descent toward Kemble Wetland Nature Reserve through maple, beech, ash, and Black Cherry forest. Through the trees on our right, the old pastures of the McPhatter farm are visible. Charles McPhatter purchased this property in 1891, worked it into the early 1900s, and raised children and livestock. It is difficult to imagine

making a living on this rugged land but by working together, pioneer families were able to manage. As we approach the wetland, hardwoods give way to conifers and softwoods: cedar, spruce, and poplars. Where the side trail meets the main Bruce Trail, we follow the white blazes to the right.

Post-glacial Lake Algonquin covered this area some 10,000 years ago. The Kemble Wetland just ahead is a remnant of this ancient lake. Today it provides critical habitat for Sandhill Crane, American Bald Eagle, and many species of waterfowl and frogs. In winter, the breeze rustles through dried cattails and cedar snags. Chickadees chatter, and snow crunches underfoot. An interpretive plaque describes the significance of the vast marsh. Our trail



▲ Peter Harris of Owen Sound crosses a seasonal stream on the Don Richards Side Trail. Bruce Trail volunteers built and installed the bridge, repurposing an old water trough as a support.



A sign provides information about the Kemble Wetland Nature Reserve. The wetland is a remnant of an ancient lake.



▲ This seasonal stream drains into Kemble Wetland, eventually flowing into the Indian River and to Owen Sound.



▲ Hikers head across abandoned fields on Kemble Rock Nature Reserve. The Niagara Escarpment rises in the distance.



▲ Fractured dolostone along the Escarpment edge. The Mystery Cabin Side Trail follows the talus slope below the edge while the main Bruce Trail provides lookouts along the top.

turns northeast through the fierce hawthorn alley where hardy volunteers recently wrestled with trail clearing.

We meander through wild apple and hawthorn trees. These shrubby species are an important step in forest succession as cleared land returns to forest. Many springs and streams emerge from the Escarpment talus slope as we climb. For another view of the wetland and a pioneer homestead, you can take the short Cedar Point Side Trail. You may be able to recognize the square foundation of the Hurlbut log cabin as you walk through it. The main trail continues uphill toward the beautiful Birches Camp. Here White Birches stand along a zigzag rail fence.

Ancient Fossils

The trail becomes rocky and rougher as we follow the slope below the Escarpment. On our left, a massive stone wall appears. At a metre high and a metre wide, it speaks to the determination of the early farmers who built it all by hand. A large cleft in the wall reveals prehistoric fossils. These corals and creatures date to 450 million years ago when the Niagara Escarpment was forming in a shallow tropical sea.

The Don Richards Side Trail goes off to the right. The main trail east from here is considered unsafe for winter travel due to many crevices, steep ledges, and rocky terrain. We follow the blue blazes back past the Kemble Wetland



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These charities near the Escarpment help sick, injured, orphaned and abandoned wild animals. Support their work through Money, Materials or Volunteering.

Bear Creek Exotic Wildlife Sanctuary
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Barrie, ON, L4M 4S4. 705.721.4730
bearcreeksanctuary.com

Hobbitstee Wildlife Regule
1226 Concession 4 Walpole, Jarvis, ON,
N0A 1J0. 519.587.2980 hobbitstee.com

National Wildlife Centre Canada
PO Box 192, Caledon East, ON, L7C 3L9.
416.577.4372 nationalwildlifecentre.ca

Procyon Wildlife
6441 7th Line, Beeton, ON, LOG 1A0.
905.729.0033 procyonwildlife.com

Shades of Hope Wildlife Refuge
PO Box 87, Pefferlaw, ON, L0E 1N0.
705.437.4654 shadesofhope.ca

The Owl Foundation
4117 21st Street, Vineland Station, ON,
L0R 2E0. 905.562.5986
theowlfoundation.ca

Toronto Wildlife Centre
4-60 Carl Hall Rd., Toronto, ON, M3K 2C1.
416.631.0662 torontowildlifecentre.com

Help Our Escarpment Animals!



◀ Hikers on the Birch Camp Side Trail.



Side Trail to complete our first loop. Soon after, another side trail appears on our left.

You can continue downhill on the Don Richards Side Trail to return to your vehicle. If you want to explore further, take the Mystery Cabin Side Trail heading uphill. We wander along the base of the cliffs to the ruins of a small cabin. No one knows for sure who built it, when, or why, hence the mystery. Ron Savage, trail director for the Sydenham Bruce Trail Club, believes it was started in the

1950s and never completed.

The view over surrounding farms and forests is spectacular. The trail follows along the talus slope to the unopened Coles Sideroad. You may choose to climb the Escarpment summit for great views, or turn downhill back to the parking area. This road allowance is suitable for winter hiking but in other seasons it is a muddy mess from ATV traffic.

We return to our vehicles. Having covered five or six km in distance, we have

travelled back through the Escarpment's formation, seen the remains of a glacial lake, encountered pioneer challenges, and observed forest succession at work. The Kemble Wetland and Kemble Rock Nature Reserves together provide protection and public access for over 120 hectares of fascinating lands. **NEV**

Sandra J. Howe's last feature for Niagara Escarpment Views was "Hikes Above Big Bay," in Autumn 2021.



▲ Peter Harris, Dennis Stier and Carol Harris head into Kemble Rock Nature Reserve on the Don Richards Side Trail.



▲ Dennis Stier of Southampton and Peter and Carol Harris of Owen Sound examine features of the Mystery Cabin foundation. It is unknown who began this structure or when, but it remains uncompleted.

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