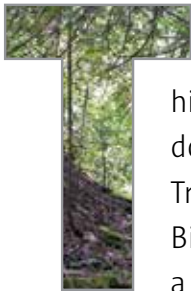


Trout Hollow Nature Reserve:

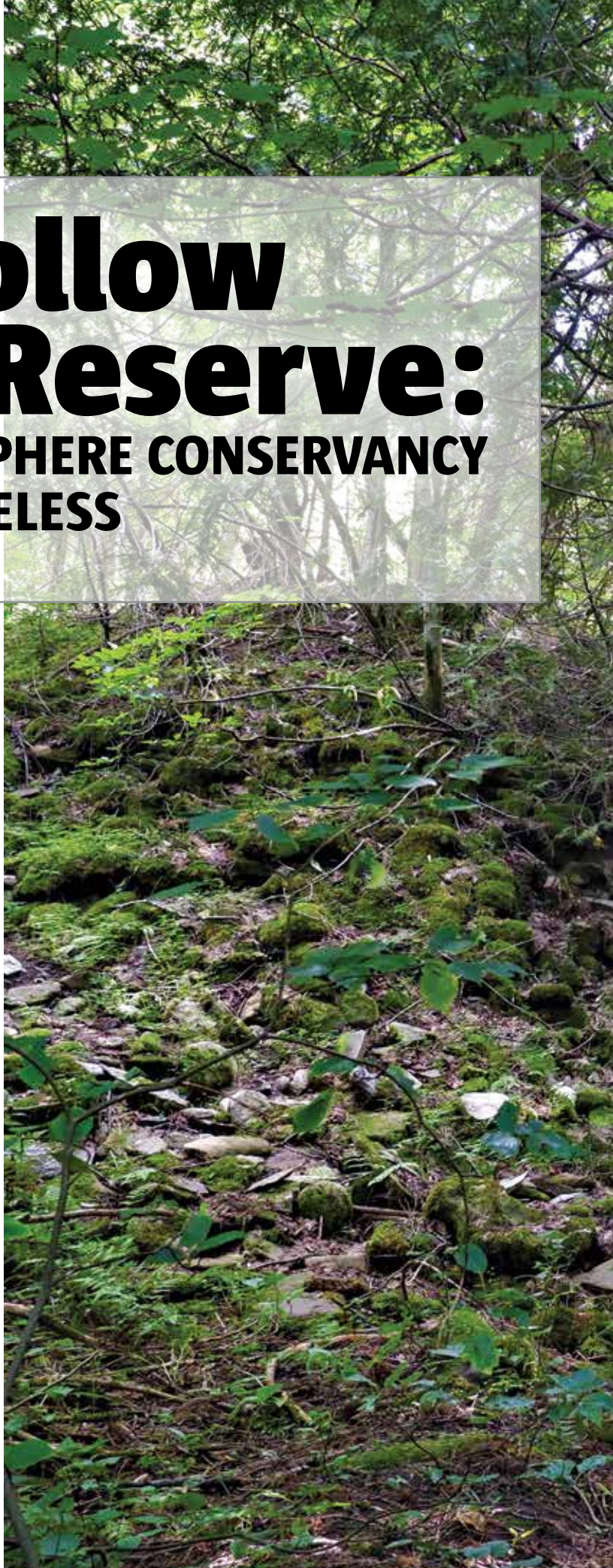
ESCARPMENT BIOSPHERE CONSERVANCY PROTECTS THE TIMELESS

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY ASHLEY BROWN



This year, the Knight family donated the entire 160 acres of Trout Hollow land to Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy, adding a truly unique property to our almost 200 reserves across Ontario. Although community groups like Friends of Trout Hollow and the Knight family lovingly cared for Trout Hollow's expanse of river and forest, as of June 2021 Trout Hollow officially became a Nature Reserve and will stay protected in perpetuity.

► Trails run all along and around the moss-covered milling channels—coming down Side Road 7 into Trout Hollow you are greeted by this channel cross-section to begin your journey.







▲ Remains of stalwart sluice gates still stand between the now-lushly forested pond site and the channels that lead back into the forest. Take a walk along the top to get an interesting perspective of the forest and meadow.

If you have had the pleasure of hiking through the Trout Hollow Nature Reserve, you'll know it's more than a place—it's a story. A story of a burgeoning community, industry, generations of care, and the resilience of nature. Trout Hollow, along the Bighead River, was once wilderness, then a place slowly settled, then a site of power and industry, and finally a place given back to nature through the care and stewardship of the Knight family and community members. Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy is proud and humbled to take up the mantle of caring for this breathtaking place and to continue the legacy of Trout Hollow.

The story of Trout Hollow begins long before European settlers were present in the area, as Wendake-Nionwentsio, Mississauga, Odawa and Anishinabewaki First Nations Territory. However, the landscape of what we now know as Trout Hollow began to change in 1855 when William Trout Sr. purchased the land from the Crown and began the Trout Sawmill. In 1861, with the help of famed naturalist, John Muir, the Trout Sawmill became the Trout Handle Factory until a fire destroyed it in its entirety in 1866. Today, all that remains of that chapter of Trout Hollow history are the building foundations, a memory surrounded by forest.

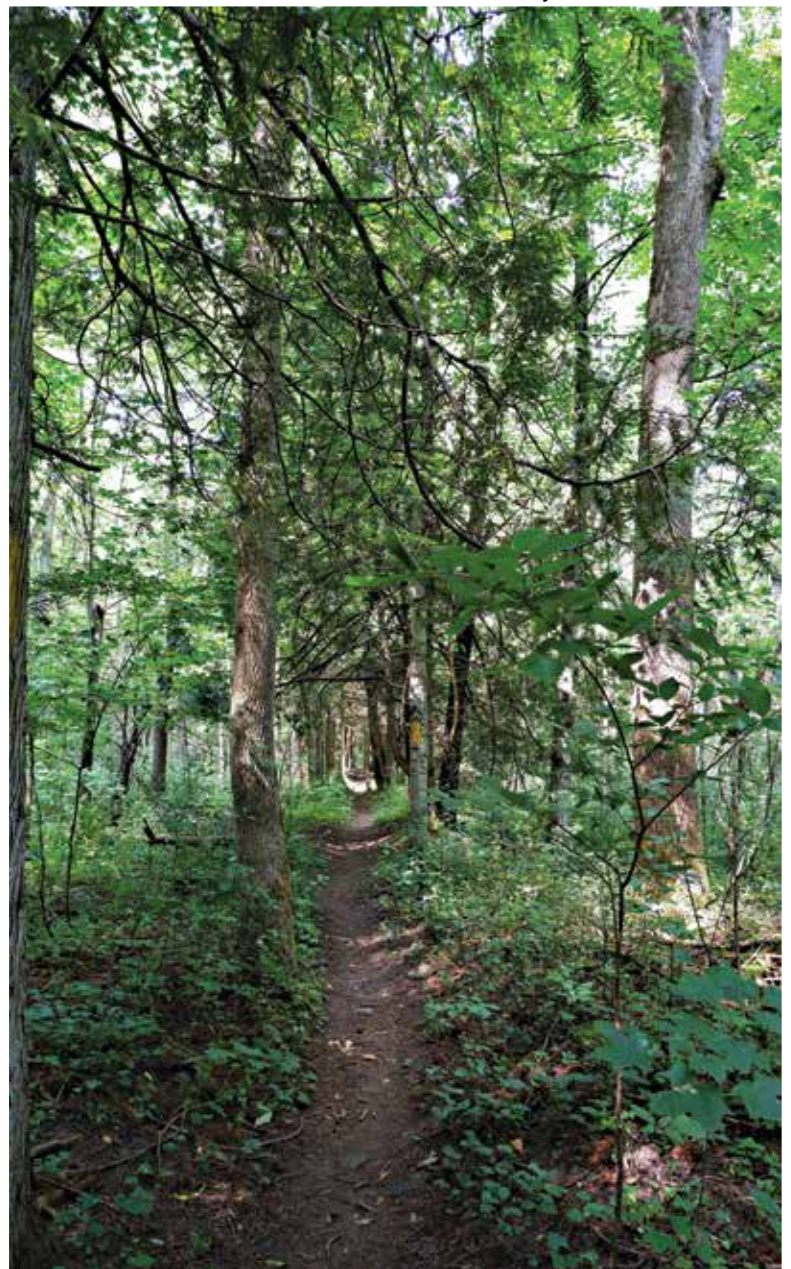


► Walking up to the Mill House S-Pipe can be jarring if you're not expecting it—surrounded by forest, the enormous pipe provides stark contrast and a reminder of how industry used to dominate this landscape. The S-Pipe was used to speed up water flowing from the Mill Pond into the Mill House; you can learn more about the milling process on the informative plaque along the trail.



◀ All that remains of the Georgian Bay Milling and Power Company Mill House are a few walls and foundations. Explore this space, but beware of poison ivy!

▼ Follow the forest trail along the milling channel and be sure to take time to note the wildflowers, ferns and bird calls amongst the cedars on either side of you.



Power to Meaford

1904 was the year the land of Trout Hollow was changed again, with the arrival of the Georgian Bay Milling and Power Company. The Bighead River provided the source of power to the quickly growing Georgian Bay community, and lit the streets of a young Meaford. Trout Hollow as we know it today was unrecognizable; industry was booming and much of the forest we see today did not exist, in its stead was a hive of human activity. The memory of this chapter still exists today with the remnants of the sluice gates, S-pipe, Mill House and dam. The Georgian Bay Milling and Power Company hit hard times when the dam was damaged in 1912, and eventually closed in 1923 with the introduction of Ontario Hydro in the area. As you hike the trails around Trout Hollow, you can see these remnants of the industry which powered young Meaford and reflect on the way nature has reclaimed these structures.

With all the human stories being told in Trout Hollow, it can be easy to miss the stories the land tells. From cedar groves, fields of ferns, lush maple forest, wetlands and the winding Bighead River, Trout Hollow offers many inspiring vistas for visitors. Scores of birds, including species at risk like the Eastern Wood-Pewee call these places home. Native flora and fauna abound amongst the industrial remains which remind us how finite our influence can be.

Three Trails

Follow deer tracks in old water channels, observe a Jack-in-the-pulpit alongside the Mill House wall, or simply stand on the shores of the Bighead River and feel the timelessness of Trout Hollow. Three trails, totalling 14 km, await explorers, each revealing a different side of Trout Hollow.



▲ The riverside trail provides endless views of the Bighead River, beautiful at any time of day or year.



▲ Remains of the dam feel gargantuan and otherworldly in this now-lush riverbank environment. Hikers can see the way forces of nature are slowly reclaiming the structure that once completely changed this landscape.



▲ Although the forest of Trout Hollow is relatively young, you can't escape a feeling of timelessness as you walk along these blazed trails.



▲ It can be hard to believe that this was a spot altered by human activity. The Bighead River certainly doesn't show it now!

THE JOHN MUIR CONNECTION

The newly-established Trout Hollow Nature Reserve is of particular interest to conservationists worldwide because of its connection to John Muir, famous as the founder of the Sierra Club and for helping to create the American national park system. In 1864 he walked through part of today's Ontario, including along some of the Niagara Escarpment. He joined his brother Daniel at the rake factory near Meaford, working there for two years.

Two feature articles on John Muir have been previously published in this magazine, both written by Ken Haigh: "John Muir's Meaford Connection" in Spring 2015 and "Glorious Freedom: John Muir's Missing Months: An Interview with Robert Burcher" in Winter 2017-18.

Robert Burcher of Clarksburg has recently published a book, *My Summer of Glorious Freedom: John Muir's Saunters Around Southern Ontario in the Summer of 1864*, which relates research and detective work done to track Muir's travels in Canada, including some mysterious months in 1864 which have been almost undocumented. The book can be directly purchased from Robert, for \$40 + \$6 shipping, through burcherphoto@gmail.com.

On the riverside trail you can spy crayfish and minnows along the Bighead's bank, watch a Belted Kingfisher and reflect on the ruins of the dam that once stood stoic against the river. Trails running through the lush mixed deciduous forest are at once a tour of past iterations of Trout Hollow and a showcasing of its current natural beauty—Wild Columbine and Bracken Ferns blanket the forest floor surrounding the old Mill House and cedars form a picturesque archway on either side of a trail running along the lip of a now-mossy milling channel. Stewards of Trout Hollow were wise to leave juxtaposing monuments of industry undisturbed; the S-Pipe and other mill equipment are a photographer's dream. Every turn on Trout Hollow's trails reveals another facet of its beauty, and always feels like a place sharing a secret with its visitors.

After the closure of the

Georgian Bay Milling and Power Company, the Knight family protected the land, once a cornerstone of industry in the area. With their care, generations of the Knight family held the land safe from development and worked with the local organization "Friends of Trout Hollow" who blazed the trails we hike today. Now, the Knights pass the torch to Escarpment Biosphere Conservancy (EBC) through their generous donation. We are delighted to add our chapter to the Trout Hollow story, and preserve this stunning place for future generations. **NEV**

Ashley Brown is an EBC volunteer, nature lover and avid hiker. She is an environmental science student and spends her free time reading, writing and exploring with her two dogs.



◀ More secrets of Trout Hollow-- at one time, Side Road 7 ran completely through the reserve and across the Bighead River. There are still a few cars scattered alongside the old road, whose stories we don't know but can imagine.



◀ EBC conservation coordinator Liv Callo stands in the former site of the Mill Pond. One hundred years prior, this area was completely underwater! Today, colourful Dame's

Rocket blankets the forest floor, almost as tall as Liv. Though not a native species, looking from above you can't help but draw parallels between the swaying of the beautiful flowers and what would have been ripples on the surface of the old Mill Pond.

▼ Regional conservation coordinator Shannon takes a moment to bird watch from a rock in the Bighead River. Kick off your shoes and enjoy the act of slowing down to appreciate the view and all that Trout Hollow has to offer.





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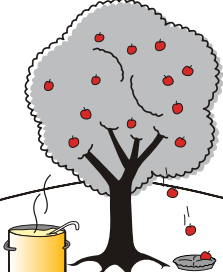
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