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EXPLORING ARNPRIOR'S
MACNAMARA TRAIL



ARNPRIOR'S MACNAMARA TRAIL

Rich in interpretation

BY KATHARINE FLETCHER

With 19 interpretation points along its four-kilometre loop, Arnprior's Macnamara Trail, helps visitors to learn the flora and fauna of the Ottawa Valley. Carleton University biologist, photographer and author Michael Runtz wrote the richly informative trail descriptions available in brochures at the trailhead (or on PDF at mfnc.ca). As you explore, you'll likely meet joggers, hikers, birdwatchers and others out enjoying the natural world.

At the trailhead next door to the Nylene Canada factory at 200 McNab St. in Arnprior, orient yourself with the map, grab a brochure and plunge into this mixed hardwood and softwood forest.

Stop No. 1 explains the club's namesake, naturalist and photographer Charles Macnamara (1870-1944), who kept meticulous diaries of his exploration of Ottawa Valley wildlife. Also, in 1913, he and Ligor Gormley started the Arnprior Christmas Bird Census. So it's unsurprising the Macnamara Field Naturalist Club adopted his name when forming this organization in 1984. Club members join community volunteers to maintain the trail with support from the landowner, Nylene, and the K.M. Hunter Foundation.

The second information stop explains wildlife recovery. Around 100 years ago, beavers were so uncommon that Macnamara was astonished to discover a lodge in a nearby pond. In the brochure, Runtz explains that although Macnamara took many photos of beaver lodges and dams, not one depicts the animal itself – these rodents had been trapped almost to extinction..

Their rarity prompted Macnamara to pressure the Ontario government to protect this. So on Dec. 22, 1920 the Nopiming Game Sanctuary was formed. Runtz notes "Nopiming" is an Ojibwa word taken from a longer phrase meaning, "the dweller in the woods is always happy." Perhaps, like me, you'll think this remains an apt name for a 21st-century visitor.

If you continue walking, signpost No. 6 will introduce you to a Walking Fern. Then take a side trail to signpost No. 7 at Goodwin's Bay on the Ottawa River and the marsh where the Macnamara Club plans to build an observation tower in the fall of 2017. Runtz writes, "The periodic flooding and drawdown (when the waters recede) is important to the ecology of this and all marshes. The flooding brings into the marsh a flush of nutrients from the river, and the draw-down exposes decaying organic matter to the air, allowing for more complete



PHOTO BY KATHARINE FLETCHER

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Getting there

From Ottawa's Parliament Hill it's 66 kilometres. Go to mfnc.ca for directions or check Google Maps using Nylene Canada, 200 McNab St, Arnprior as the destination. Free parking across the street from the Trailhead. Macnamara club asks, "Please, no dogs."

More trail coming soon

Janet Mason has been a club member for 15 years and is in charge of its "trail extension project." It will mean a new observation deck and an additional loop to connect the existing trail on the south section of the property to the currently unused north side near McNab Street. This will open a different forest ecology for visitors.

Construction is planned for late summer or fall 2017. Runtz said the planned loop "will give users a first-hand look at a marsh ecosystem, which supports a diversity of wetland plants and animals including swamp sparrows, Virginia rails, muskrats, and beavers. It will also take trail users through a stately grove of eastern hemlocks, offering yet another option for those seeking to spend more time exploring natural habitats in the Ottawa Valley."

You too can get in on it

If you join the Macnamara Field Naturalist Club you'll learn more about how nature operates in the Ottawa Valley. Monthly meetings have a "bottom-up" approach – they all start with recent observations by the members. Later in the meeting, professional biologists give illustrated talks. Regular outings such as the spring Owl Prowl get everybody outdoors. Details on joining at mfnc.ca



decomposition by bacteria, which require oxygen for their work."

(Not all of Runtz's notes are pure biology. His powers as a punster and humourist show up in some of the signs.)

Backtrack briefly to the main trail and continue by turning left. You'll encounter other signposts marking plants like the demure wild ginger – in early spring its heart-shaped leaf hides a brown flower that hugs the earth. Other signs explain points of geological interest such as Precambrian marble outcroppings.

And there's human history too. Stop No. 16 marks the stump of a white pine, the species which, along with red pine, birthed the Ottawa Valley logging industry. Valley logs gave Britain much-needed timbers for the Royal Navy after Napoleon blockaded the Baltic Sea and its surrounding forests in 1806.

Runtz explains, "Arnprior's status as an insignificant little hamlet changed dramatically with the arrival of Daniel McLachlin, an important lumberman and politician. In 1862, he established the first of four water-powered sawmills at the newly incorporated Village of Arnprior. By the early 1900s, up to a thousand men, including Charles Macnamara, were employed by the McLachlin Lumber Company."

Enjoy your stroll shadowed by these historical figures and I bet you'll emerge, just as my husband Eric and I did, refreshed with learning how rich nature is in what could be considered "just an ordinary little path through the woods."



Wild Ginger on the Macnamara walking trail

White Cedar with pileated woodpecker holes



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