

Newport Forest

May 19 2001

2:00 - 5:05 pm

weather: fair, warm 21 C, sw breeze

purpose: to examine potential new conservation property

participants: Kee, Stan Caveney

Having heard recently of a farm lot for sale across the river, I alerted Stan Caveney, who had earlier expressed an interest in such properties. Stan drove me to the farm of Lyle and Julie Haggith. Lyle is a cousin of Duke Newport and a much-broken man. He has had several serious falls, has had a stroke, suffers from prostate cancer, and is afflicted as well with a serious degenerative bone disease that causes them to break quite easily. His most recent accident was to crack two vertebrae as a result of simply twisting in his tractor seat!

We met with Julie and Lyle, as well as their real estate agent, Greg Knight of Glencoe. Described a "Lot 21 BF, Range 1, S of Longwoods," the farm has an extensive river frontage with a small block of forest. Going in, we also thought it contained this ravine forest that we had seen on our topmaps, an ideal "link" with the Skunk's Misery forest to the north and Newport Forest to the south.

We sat around the kitchen table, learning that the asking price had recently been reduced from \$249K to \$240K, a minimum deposit of \$5000 being required to hold the property, that taxes were \$1100-1200 per year, and that the farm consisted of 83 acres: 30 acres river flats (workable); 25 acres for grazing, and 3 acres of ravine forest. Julie expressed the hope that whoever bought the farm would allow the couple to occupy the house, at which point old Lyle began to weep, a most unexpected and distressing development. This happened twice more in the course of our conversation and I found myself resolving that whoever bought the property had better treat the old couple kindly. We discussed a few options, including severance, the Stan and I departed to drive down to the river flats acreage and explore a bit.

The ravine we sought seemed to lie to the west, so we walked through the river forest and crossed a couple of fences to get there. The ravine was gorgeous, full of elms, hackberrys, oaks, maples, and other trees, with a merry brook running down its middle. The sides were sometimes steep, sometimes giving way to walkable terraces covered with grasses. We followed the ravine north to the Longwoods, losing the brook somewhere in dense foliage. As we scrambled up the bank, we startled a Cottontail, which shot across my path and off into some bushes.

Across the road, our hearts dropped. On the other side was a huge expanse of boulders, descending to the bottom of the matching ravine to the north. Stan decided to get the car, while I scrambled down the slope of boulders to see what connection there was between the two ravines.

At the bottom, after some wrong turns, I found a large culvert that passed under the road. It was about two metres in diameter and about 40 metres long, certainly adequate to allow the passage of any animal one finds in these parts! It was clear all the way through, with only occasional boulders.

I ended up walking back to the farmhouse, only to find Stan in deep discussion with Julie Haggith. We had the wrong property! The ravine was on the Sittler farm, next to the west. The Haggith ravine was off to the east, was very short, connected to its opposite number to the north by a one-metre wide culvert (good for everything but deer), and connected with very little in the way of Skunk's Misery. We said our goodbyes and I promised Julie that I would see her again.

Somewhat depressed, Stan and I paid a hurried visit to Newport Forest to check the deer carcass and to examine whatever beetles might be feeding on it. We collected about three different beetles (IDs to come), including two carrion beetles and their larvae, as well as a Rove Beetle. Stan said the hide and hair beetles would probably arrive later, by June.

The property continues to dry out and the newly planted trees continue to die. We better have rain soon!