

Newport Forest

August 9 2000

5:00 - 6:15 pm

Weather: intermittent rain and sun, cooling, west wind

Purpose: to visit the Moraviantown Reserve and Newport Forest

Participants: Kee

This report covers two separate trips or visits, the first to the Delaware Reserve at Moraviantown. This visit has a bearing on Newport Forest in two ways: wildlife observations and reforestation problems.

At the invitation of Darren Jacobs, I visited the Delaware Reservation this afternoon, arriving about 10 minutes late at the Band Office. The air was heavy and sultry, with no rain to speak of (yet). I found Darren inside the Band Office in a room on one side where he had a computer set up. The screen showed a map based on a 10 year old aerial photo, with an attractive "screen-saver" made by Darren from a colour photo he shot of wildflowers. Behind his chair was a book shelf full of books on trees and medicinal plants, all arranged with their covers out, like a bookstore display. He did not yet have *Trees in Canada*, so I offered to bring him a copy.

The computer-produced map showed a portion of the reserve lands currently planted in corn. The band council had decided to take a portion of the 60-acre field out of production in order to implement a reforestation scheme of Darren's. He suggested we go for a walk by the site.

Outside the office, his Uncle Glen (Jacobs) waited for us, a most friendly man who seemed ready to laugh at a moment's notice. Darren introduced him as a repository of tribal knowledge and history, one who spoke fluent Delaware. I mentioned that I had become interested in the Delwares after Reading James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Glen said in a most modest and non-boastful way that he had been a consultant for the movie by the same name. (He spoiled part of the movie for me by revealing that the opening scene where Hawkeye, Cingchacook and Unka are hunting a great Elk, that the beast was made out of rubber and ran along a track hidden among the trees!) Because the Mohican language is lost, the producers of the film decided to hire a Delaware-speaking person to act as consultant because Mohican was just a variant of Delaware, itself in the Algonkian language group.

We drove from the band office to the old Moravian church and got out to stroll the cliff top between the corn field in question and the south side of the Thames.

We stopped to examine a rather large group of willows across the river. Darren had helped his uncle plant those trees many years ago. They had simply taken a large number of cuttings and stuck them in the wet soil in the spring! Had there been much cutting on the reserve? A great deal, as it turns out. When I told them the prices I had heard for veneer logs, Glen declared that they were probably getting scammed by the lumber people.

Here also, Glen explained how they had fished in the river for their food, both now and in the ancient (200 years ago) past. The men had cut down young White Ash trees, about 6 to 8 inches in diameter, then trimmed them somewhat so they made long, springy poles perhaps 30 or more feet long. The bases of the poles were supported on the riverbank by a tripod-like arrangement of wood and the pole was sprung downward to immerse a net suspended from its end. When Glen was a boy, the nets had been made of steel screening enclosed in a framework of wood. Because the whole arrangement would float, weights had to be added so that when the pole was sprung downward, the net would sink to the bottom of the river.

Later, the entire net was metal, so no weights were needed. The men would visit the nets "whenever they felt like it," to see if any fish were caught. They caught Pickerel in this way, some Trout, but mostly Catfish and (White) Suckers, including a small species of Sucker called a "Mullet." The most fish they had pulled up at any time was four, but people felt lucky if they got just one. Pickerel were the best eating, especially in spring. Darren got sick once eating a "summer catfish" All fish taste better in the spring.

We were headed for a strip of vegetation (mostly trees) about 20 to 40 feet wide and giving away rather abruptly on the river side to a steep bank about 50 feet high. As we approached the first group of trees, the two asked me to settle a question involving a tree they had always called "River Ash." The small grove turned out to be almost exclusively composed of Box Elders. I told them the joke about "Manitoba Maples" versus "Ontario Maples." Only lately, I said, had I come to realize that in the right place they were a valuable native species.

Further along the dirt road we found White Elms and Sycamores in abundance, including some elms that Glen said were Slippery Elm. I told him I was still learning about Elms. His father had said that Slippery Elm could always be distinguished from White Elm by the tendency of the bark to be organized into long narrow strips. Interspersed among the foregoing species were three species of Poplars, including Trembling Aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Glen seemed to enjoy

the flat leaf petiole and how it served to make the leaf tremble. I said that when they trembled, they looked as though they were afraid of something. He said that his mother told him that you could always tell a storm was coming by looking at the Trembling Aspens (although she may not have called them that). If they turned white, a storm was on its way. We also found some Lagre-tooth Aspen (*Populus grandidentata*) and, later, an extremely large Eastern Cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*).

As we walked I mentioned the little I had learned so far about reforestation, being especially careful to mention the rather uniform forest types that had existed thereabouts. “At least we have an idea of what to shoot for.” I explained that as far as I knew at the moment it didn’t much matter what trees one put in for the first stage, but if you wanted the climax forest sooner, it was better to pick fast-growing species like Poplars or Tulip Trees. They asked me if any Black Gum might be around. I said we could go looking for it some day in nearby swamps, but not to hold their breath. I explained how seed for unusual or rare native trees was never so available as these days. We also talked about other rare species, including Pawpaw. Glen was much taken with the name. I explained about the fruit and about how it was said to grow here and there along the banks of the Thames itself, so why not on the “rez?”

“Look” I said, pointing to the Plantains passing underfoot, “Somebody told me these are called ‘White man’s Footprints’.” Glen said they just called the Path Companion Plant (or something like that). Sensing a good time to make my “little pitch,” I asked them if anyone thereabouts had seen any large cats lately. I was surprised when Darren told me about a young, tawny Cougar he had seen a few years back “when they were having all those sighting down by West Lorne.” I said I would get back to him about it. Another relative of his had also seen a large adult cat once.

The men abruptly cut into the bush along a path that led to a lower bank terrace where they showed me an absolutely humungous Eastern Cottonwood. I went back to the van for the tape and we measured it: 6.41 metres in girth at 20 cm above ground and 5.87 m girth at breast height. The diameter of the tree would average about 2.04 metres and 1.87 metres at the respective heights of the two measurements. We discussed some of the plants growing near the tree, including the Yellow-flowered Jewelweed, some pink Phlox, and Stinging Nettles.

I asked if there was any unusual wildlife around (beside Cougars) and Darren mentioned a canoe trip he had taken up to “near Wardsville” where he had entered

a navigable creek, by a bend in the river, on the south side. (Would this not be Fleming's Creek? From his further description, it would seem so.) He had gone up the creek to where some deadfall blocked further progress. Then he had stopped for a smoke. Suddenly a flying squirrel had glided right over his canoe from one side of the creek to the other.

We drove back to the church and another small strip of wood where the men showed me another large tree, this one dead but looking as though it had once been a Sycamore. We measured it at 3.97 metres circumference for an average of 1.26 metres dbh, quite (another) monster!

They asked what those trees were growing beside the Church. We found both Honey Locust and Black Locust, so I explained some easy ways to tell the difference. Glen had thought one of these might even be a Kentucky Coffe Tree. (Every now and then I would hear him mutter under his breath, "Pawpaw, hmmm.") I explained about the "leaf" of the KC.

We drove back to the band office where I said goodbye after agreeing to call Darren within two weeks with some further information. I explained that soon I would be meeting a "real expert" who could set us all straight on how to go about growing a forest. I mentioned his name: Bill Pricksaitis.

I left the Reserve, buying a coke on my way out, then drove to Newport Forest through a newly arrived cloudburst. Heavy rain for about half an hour, then lightening as I drove along the Fleming Line, stopping in front of the Alderton house where the historical plaque commemorating the Flemings has been emplaced. Eva Newport had wondered just how big that sign was: 14" wide by 16" high, with a semicircular boss on the upper edge. I continued on the the Hurdle's, where Nina handed me the addresses and phone numbers of three area newspapers that she thought we should invite to the celebration buffet. She thought a complete statement of the new direction the property would take would be in order, mainly to serve notice to all who had been trespassing on the property. Before I continued on to the forest, we briefly discussed signage for the property. Edgar thought NO TRESSPASSING would be sufficient.

I drove down through the meadow to the OCF entrance where I parked the van and got out. Silence. No one there but me. This was an experience i wanted to savour, this being the first time I had been alone on the land. I put the coke in my backpack and made my way down to the Landing. The rain had recently ended and everything was wet, but I put an old dog-biscuit bag on a grassy bump and sat

down, finding it quite comfortable. The sun was out now and the landscape warmed up all over. I wanted to enjoy the sensation of “my land,” but a voice said, “This land belongs to no one.”

Almost immediately, my attention was taken by a group of very attractive birds that were flying back and forth across the river, sometimes up and down it, then perching on a tree, near or far. They seemed to do this by turns, like children playing. I examined two of the birds when they perched in a nearby tree, as though to catch their breath. Cedar Waxwings. How odd. I thought these birds were herbivores, yet they had dived, zoomed, even hovered like Kingbirds over the water, as though catching insects. Could my initial impression be correct? Might they simply be “having fun?”

It was now 6 O’clock and getting late. I saw two Spotted Sandpipers wagging their rumps up and down along our shore about 20 metres away, as they searched for washed-up invertebrates. Somewhat reluctantly, I left.

Species Found

Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>	Riverbank
Spotted Sandpiper	<i>Actitis macularia</i>	Riverbank
Grey Treefrog	<i>Hyla versicolor</i>	OCF (near river)

Supplemental

Southern Flying Squirrel	<i>Glaucomys volans</i>	Flemings Creek
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