

Newport Forest

August 13 2000

7:00 - 8:30 pm

Weather: cloudy, clearing, warm 24C, calm

Purpose: to walk the property with Donald Craig

Participants: Pat, Kee, Donald Craig

Having come to the annual West Elgin Nature Club canoe picnic in big Bend Conservation Area, we had an opportunity to meet with some very interesting and knowledgeable people, including Donald Craig and Bill Preicksaitis, people that we had heard much about but never met face to face. We decided to consult with Bill more extensively on another occasion and invited Donald down to the property with us following the picnic.

Donald proved to be a mine of detailed information which he imparted more or less at random, we taking notes. For example, Birdsfoot Trefoil attracts mice that girdle trees, so you don't want it growing around new or young trees. We walked into the OCF, Donald pointing out a Slippery Elm (which he called "Red Elm") This tree had the bark organized into narrow, separate strips, just the way Glen Jacobs had told me Slippery Elm bark looked. But Donald discounted bark IDs, telling us how he had been fooled once as a student. He peeled off a piece of bark and showed us the uniform, reddish bands in the corky layer and pointing out that the same layer in White Elm bark had whitish bands. However, as I compared the Slippery Elm with a nearby White Elm, I could see the bark was quite different even morphologically, Glen Jacob's description being borne out. This doubled my confidence in Donald's identification.

We took the OCF trail behind the Hogsback, as i wanted to show Pat (and Donald) how far we had taken the trail to date. Well in, Donald pointed out the young Blue Ash I had already ID'd. I asked him where the parent tree might be and he pointed behind us on the trail. Two large Blue Ash reared skyward from the slopes of the Hogsback. Both maintained their diameter toward the crown and sported twisty, dead branches on the way up, both characteristic of this species, according to Donald. One reason why there are so many Black Walnut in the OCF, according to Donald was that walnuts float during flooding and are carried well away from the parent tree, ultimately populating the forest wherever the water carries them. We asked where the Prickly Ash might be. He said to watch for a bush that "grabbed you," as it has thorns just like those on a rose.

As far as Donald was concerned, most of the OCF was once open grazing land or "agricultural field," even if by 1975 (the date of our aerial photo) much of it had

grown back in. He doubted if any of the trees in there were over 100 years old. Donald reckoned that mostly oak would have been cut, as it makes better veneer, the heartwood being the same colour as the outer wood. As for the Hogsback, he wondered if at one time the land had two separate owners. (We had noticed a distinct line crossing the Hogsback in our aerial photo, a line that separated a wooded portion from one that had been recently (in 1975) cut.)

He pointed out that now that the cattle were (long) gone, the Whiter Ash were coming up everywhere. In discussing the fate of a young ash beside us, we pointed out what appeared to be a very large hawthorn, blocking its light. "That's not a hawthorn," said Donald. "It's a wild apple." (another new species) We asked him if we might expect to find Green Ash on the property. Donald said to examine the new buds. Whereas White Ash has a convex bud, Green Ash has a concave one. Later, he pulled a leaf from an overhanging limb. It was from a Black Maple. Donald invited us to feel the fuzzy leaf surface, quite distinct from the feel of a Sugar Maple. Mind you, they seemed to hybridize regularly, so you could get intermediate forms. In any case, there was no way, according to Craig, to tell the two species apart on the basis of bark alone. This surprised us. During this and previous conversations, Pat heard a Chickadee and a Cardinal.

We went on the river landing, where Pat ascended the Riverside Trail to try the new surface. The Cedar Waxwings were still plying the river, something that Donald had noticed on another stretch of the river while canoeing to the picnic earlier in the day. We noticed that "fishflies" were flying and he wondered if perhaps they weren't catching these to feed young, as it was nesting season for them (?) (They looked more like Mayflies to me. Later, I read that the Golden Mayfly was very common in our area and emerged more or less continuously from May to late August.

On the way out, he advised us to sign the property with a message something like:
ACCESS BY PERMISSION ONLY 679-8105

New Species:

Slippery Elm	<i>Ulmus Rubra</i>	OCF
"Wild Apple"	<i>Malus domestica</i>	OCF