

Date and time: Thursday November 19 2015 1:30 - 4:30 pm.

Weather: Prec. 8 mm; RH 67%; BP 101.9; ; SW 30-40 kmh; T 12°C

Activity: Exploring Blind Creek.

Today I brought Brian Cornish, an indefatigable volunteer, to assist in the search for Blind Creek. Today was to be Historical Geography day, so to speak. The aim was to investigate whether the chain of vernal ponds that winds through the Blind Creek Forest once ran with water, a continuation of Fleming Creek hundreds of years ago. Here is a view looking “upstream” from Vernal Pond A.



Added for scale is the handle of Brian’s shovel in the foreground. He would use it to seek one of the now-buried riffles (rapids) — if it ever existed. Before digging for the riffle, however, we walked into the scene pictured above. At the very end of this supposed ancient channel was the cutoff point, where we think Fleming Creek found a new outlet into the Thames River, leaving its former continuation “blind.”

On our exploratory walk along Blind Creek, the day’s agenda suddenly went awry with the discovery of a sick Raccoon lying near the base of a tree in Vernal Pond B. (See IMAGES.) It was a female, breathing but moving very little. Brian wondered whether we should try to care for it. He knew that Pat and I had done a fair bit of

rehab work with Raccoons over the years. I was doubtful. “We’ll decide later. Just leave her there for now.”

On we went to the major exploration event of the visit, the search for a riffle bed beneath the high points between vernal ponds. Brian dug two holes at my direction at the place we call The Elbow; here the trail makes a sharp bend toward the river. Both holes went down two feet. Nada. No rocks. Just a brownish clayish soil that looked a lot like flood sediment deposited over a long time. How deep did it go?

I felt discouraged. My idea that Fleming Creek once flowed behind the Hogback was dissipating rapidly. But another explanation entirely occurred to me when I got home that evening to examine a geological map. (See IMAGES.) Meanwhile I took a sample of soil from our test holes. It was odd-looking for a forest soil, being a light brown and not darkly humic. Was it flood sediment?

While Brian dug I operated a metal detector in the vicinity of the Elbow to see what might turn up. The first howl produced a rusty nail an inch below the surface. The next howl produced a squashed Carnation tin about 2 inches down.

“Wanna get that ‘coon now?” asked Brian. Me without thinking: “Might as well.” We carried it back to the trailer where it wandered around inside, rather unsteady on its feet, but seemingly more energetic after some kibble and water. This encouraged me and I decided to take her home to observe for a day or two. The next day, she was quite active, wandering around the (unheated) back porch and steadier on her feet. But by Saturday morning she had gone into a relapse and we decided to take her back to Newport Forest. On site we set her out by the old nursery box that used to be attached high up on the Black Maple in the Nook. (It finally fell off the tree last April.) She was still breathing at that point but moving very little. “Good luck old girl.” If she recovers, great. Otherwise she will die with dignity in the very nursery box where she may have been born!

This narrative overshadows our single new species of the day, a spider that I spotted in the leaf litter right beside the raccoon when we first found her. Somewhat ominously, it was our first species in the family Anyphaenidae — Ghost Spiders.

Phenology: First snowfall November 21.

New Species: (25% new - hardly meaningful)

Ghost Spider

Hibana gracilis

VP-B KD Nv19/15

Old Species:

‘White Doily Bracket’ (*Trametes conchifer*); Ichneumon Wasp (*Cratichneumon* sp.); Feral Cat (*Felis domesticus*)

Species Notes:

The trail cam at The Hole was accidentally set on video mode, something we had never tried. The results were amazing and included several 15 second videos of a large buck standing in front of the camera, then turning or wandering off. What large animals they are! A black feral cat also showed up.

Readers Write:

Joan Durrance, a Library Scientist retired from the University of Michigan, writes: “Thanks so much for the bulletins which I have read and enjoyed. It’s quite wonderful to find out that not only did you donate this preserve, but that you work with others to document its flora and fauna. Please keep me on the list.

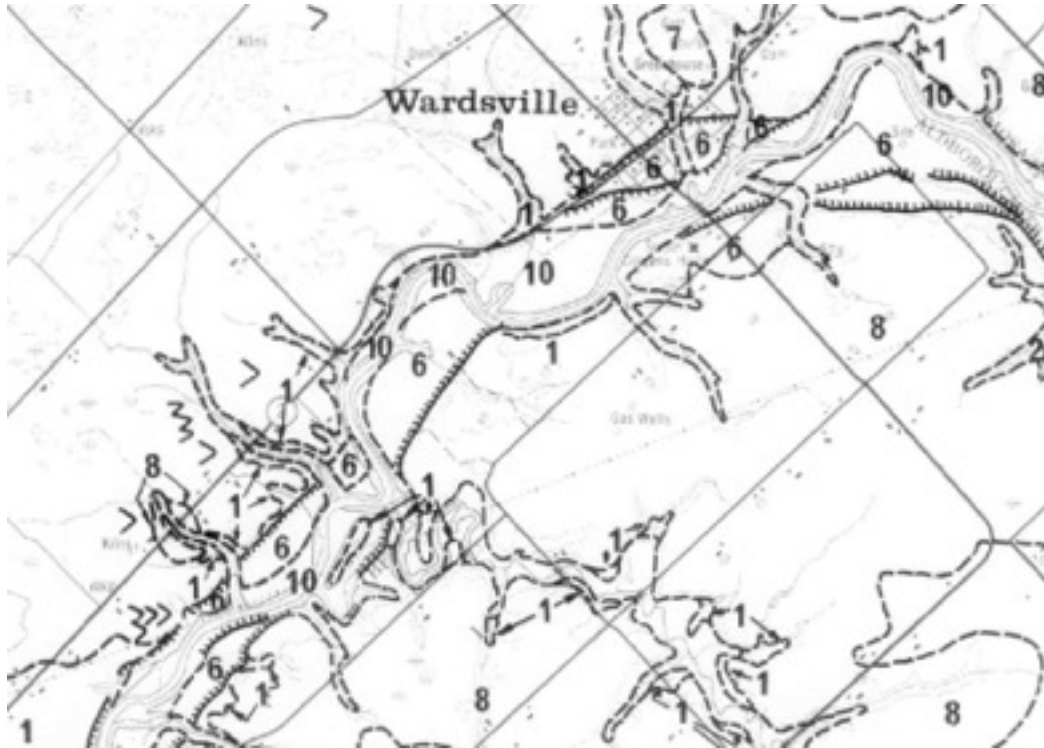
“I’m playing catch-up on botanical identification. We’ve been doing botanical focused hikes occasionally for years, but since I retired, I have spent more time learning scientific names. We are fortunate to be able to go out periodically with botanist Ellen Weatherbee. On these hikes in various environments (including bogs and fens) Ellen provides us with plant lists specific to that site that include scientific name, common name, wetness rating, and coefficient of conservation. Living on a small lake with a wetland between us and the lake, I have had the delightful experience of being able to observe the plants and animals that call our wetland home. My camera has been enormously helpful to this learning process.

“I appreciate your bulletin and congratulations to you and Pat for your wonderful work!”

Catching up:

New readers who would like to read past issues of the *Bulletin* may visit the archive at <http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~akd/newport-forest/> and scroll to the bottom.

IMAGES:



With thanks to Peter Dewdney for making this map available.

A portion of the “quaternary map” of the Wardsville area showing some postglacial features, including contours of an earlier much wider river when the Hogsback (NE of the lowest 10) was apparently isolated for a time, with a river channel on either side. If I have interpreted this map correctly, Fleming Creek never did flow behind the Hogsback. Instead, the river did! This would explain the floodlike, alluvial sediment at depth in what we now call Blind Creek. Note that the Fleming Creek Channel, apparently enters the river just upstream from the Hogsback, then as now; this would imply that there never was a diversion event, so there is little use in trying to date it!

Out the window goes my wonderful fantasy about a native camp or town behind the Hogback. Over time, as the river cut a narrower, deeper channel on the west side of the Hogsback, the area we now call Blind Creek Forest emerged as “dry” land, basically a swamp. Does this solve the mystery of Blind Creek?



A young female Raccoon that turned out to have distemper lies at the base of an old Black Willow on one of the “banks” of Blind Creek. She seemed to be near death when she suddenly got up and staggered unsteadily about. All I knew at the time was that the disease appeared to be neurological and quite probably viral. Could she be rehabbed? In spite of years rehabbing Raccoons, we completely forgot about distemper!

The diagnosis of distemper came over the phone with Brian Salt of Salt-haven Rehabilitation Centre in Mt Brydges. According to Brian there has been an epidemic of both canine and feline distemper this year. Raccoons are susceptible to both diseases. Distemper is a viral disease that attacks the central nervous system. Humans do not get it.