

The Making of the Bruce Trail, 1954 to 2004
by Norman Pearson, 2005

Reviewed by George Hough, Vice President, Iroquoia Bruce Trail Club

If you ever wanted to know why and who was involved when the Bruce Trail came to be, your search for answers may now be over. Who came up with the idea, who planned out how to move forward, who walked the escarpment seeking out the optimum route, who linked with land-owners to bring them along - there are so many such questions. If you were looking for a "How to Set Up A Public Hiking Trail For Dummies" book, this just may be it. Dr. Pearson's book even explains why the walking fern became so important to the Bruce Trail Association, then and now?

From today's eyes the presence of the Bruce Trail on our landscape seems so obvious, even so necessary. It not only adds balance to the hustle and bustle of our daily work, family and personal lives, the trail and the escarpment are rightly seen as being among Canada's major environmental treasures. Confirmation of this special status is readily found historically in the Gertler Report of 1970, the escarpment being designated as a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO and more recently by the Ontario Government's innovative and forward-thinking Greenbelt Plan.

What is so patently obvious to one and all today - simply wasn't so, only a few short years ago. At that time, before the conception of a public hiking trail, the escarpment was merely an obstacle to our many transportation routes, a convenient source of construction aggregate, and the provider of a fine view over the lowlands below here and there.

Norman Pearson's book deftly lifts away the veil of time, taking the reader back to the early conceptualizing of the Bruce Trail by Ray Lowes, one of the three central personalities involved. The book describes the never-ending difficulties and challenges which had to be overcome at the beginning and along the way. It casts light on the links and partnerships formed which were essential to bringing the dream of a trail to become the reality we all love and cherish, and keeping the trail intact through the years. The book also explains the processes and support received from organizations like the Hamilton Naturalists Club and Federation of Ontario Naturalists, each level of government, local land owners, other community agencies, volunteers, donors and the like all made, each filling gaps the others could not. It also speaks to the development of the many Bruce Trail symbols across the years, from letterhead to trail blazes, and maps and is accompanied by a striking collection of historic photos, maps and graphics.

As one reads through the book, its best to be prepared to be surprised repeatedly. In large part this is because BTA history is something few of us are not sufficiently familiar with today. Current Bruce Trail hikers and BTA members have become separated from their history - and become too wrapped up with the flowers, geology, or fauna along the trail or the operational issues of maintaining the trail. In one sense though, this may be the best measure of the success of the trail itself.

Dr. Pearson was one of the initial trio, along with Ray Lowes and Dr. Robert MacLaren, when

the trail was merely a far-off dream. Phil Gosling joined, creating a quartet and went about forming and fostering an enthusiastic throng of hundreds of committed workers at the grass-roots. While the trio managed the organizational challenges, Phil Gosling and his team built the trail. Together, this quartet turned Ray Lowes' dream into a reality.

Although not written as a 'who-done-it' Pearson's writing creatively teases the reader to unconsciously ask questions, which he addresses and then answers. In doing so, the book flows like a sparkling woodland stream, from event to event, contribution to contribution, partnership to partnership and repeatedly over the familiar stones of obstacle to solution.

Where at first blush, one might imagine a book about the conceptualizing of a hiking trail and the formation of what became the Bruce Trail Association to be a rather dry and at worst a historical piece filled with endless detail. Dr. Pearson's book instead like a good 'who-done-it', engaging the reader by making the BTA story - seem alive and in motion, making the reading of the story much more worthwhile than the effort, even though we all know the conclusion.

Dr. Pearson's book is at one level a testament to the Hamilton Naturalists Club and Federation of Ontario Naturalists and their important contributions to the formation of the Bruce Trail Association. On another level it best serves as a formal statement of gratitude to Dr. Pearson: Ray Lowes, Dr. Robert MacLaren, Philip Gosling, Dr. Sherwood Fox, and the many others who made the dream of a trail their own and whose dedication and creativity not only bore fruit as the Bruce Trail, but as numerous other hiking trails all across Canada. To all of these hiking pioneers we owe a great debt of gratitude.

Pearson, Norman. (2005), *The Making of the Bruce Trail*. Port Stanley: Norman Pearson and Associates Ltd. First edition in paperback, 137 pages excluding 24 pages of photographs, graphics and maps, ISBN: 1-896008-14-3.

This book may be ordered from the publisher at 550 George Street, Port Stanley, Ontario, N5L 1H4 for \$26.75 (cheque or money order, no credit cards) which includes PST, GST and postage.

Earth Day Event

Norman Pearson Lecture