

Annual barbecue brings together fans of the MTRI

JUNE

Some time ago I wrote about lichen researcher Tom Neily, who works out of the Mersey Tobetic Research Institute. Neily had discovered a particular fir tree in Cape Breton that plays host to over fifty individual boreal felt lichen, whereas the normal host tree has one or two.

That story has now made Canadian Geographic magazine, in its current issue. Canadian Geographic is a high-quality national magazine owned by the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. Its mission is to celebrate Canada. It features stories on exploring Canada, the environment and travel, as well as people and culture.

In its June issue there is a story about Tom Neily's discovery of the so-called Super Tree in Cape Breton, which hosts an astonishing number of boreal felt lichen. It notes that these lichen can only be found in this province, plus in Norway, Alaska and Newfoundland. The lichen is endangered, which is why the finding of the tree in Cape Breton is such a big story.

Speaking of the Mersey Tobetic Research Institute, its annual barbecue was held last week, and your humble columnist was put to work flipping burgers. About a hundred people turned up to munch on both vegetarian and meat burgers, sausages, salads, breads, cake and ice cream. The day was hot and the air was festive.

At a meeting just before the barbecue, new MTRI board chair Colin Gray presided over his first session, then took up duties at the grill to my left. Outgoing chair Dianne Clapp and her husband, Harold, were as busy as ever, however, with Harold manning the barbecue on my right, grilling Italian sausages.

Colin Gray, who lives in Liverpool, once worked with the Bridgewater police department. He has, since leaving the force, been working in his wife, Mary Lou Conohan's, podiatry clinics in Bridgewater and Liverpool. Gray's association with the MTRI has, in his words, "rekindled an old interest" in wildlife and the natural environment, giving him a chance to take an active role in species at risk research.

Colin was one of the eight paddlers who redid the original 1908 Tent Dwellers trip through the interior of Southwestern Nova Scotia as a part of the Tent Dwellers festival two summers ago. Gray paddled with Bob Thexton, former chief park warden at Kejimikujik.

One of the other paddlers on the trip was Alain Belliveau, a forestry student and now a researcher at MTRI (who put on MTRI summer lectures, on old growth forests, last week). Colin, whose summer home near Kejimikujik, became interested in MTRI, and that was intensified after meeting MTRI chair Dianne Clapp at the Annapolis Royal farmers' market that same year. He joined the board and is now chair.

In the time since 2008 Colin got involved with turtle recovery, working around his cottage at Prosser Lake, in Kempt; in the Park itself; and in the Bowater District.

It's fun to look around the MTRI site in Kempt through the trees you can see tents set up, where researchers are using as their bases while doing their work in the area. Further up the hill, the bunkhouse is full of people who by day fan out across the local area gathered about the natural world for a variety of projects.

Researchers using MTRI this summer include students and professors, people from the Nova Scotia Community College, government, community groups, volunteer staff members employed by MTRI. They are involved in conducting research into the province's coasts, forests, freshwater and wetlands and into various aspects of the human dimension in Southwest Nova Scotia.

One of the fascinating pieces of work has to do with 284 hectares just behind the MTRI site in Kempt. In 2007 the province bought the land from Bowater Mersey and is working with MTRI to gather information about the site, which the project refers to as the Kempt Provincial Reserve. The goal is to provide information for eventual management plans for the area.

The project involves doing a forest inventory, collecting demographic data and to mapping the forests and special features of the area. The project has been underway since 2008 and has already yielded a lot of information in terms of natural resources information. The MTRI is looking forward to stewardship of this reserve and is working with the Department of Natural Resources to design management plans.

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