



Friends of
Mashkinonje

THE WETLANDS OBSERVER

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Home of the Blue-spotted Salamander, Sedge Wren, and numerous other species



Ever Wonder What's Down That Trail?

By Chuck Miller, Superintendent, Mashkinonje Provincial Park

Driving along Highway #64, it is too easy to pass the Mashkinonje sign and think; "Someday I am going to explore that trail." Did you ever wonder what is down that trail? Guaranteed there is more than you might first expect!

Forget about the 8,000 year old provincially significant peatland at the end of the trail for a moment; there is so much to see along the way. If you do make it all the way to the end of the trail, you now have a great aerial view of the peatland expanse from a brand new 25 foot lookout tower. The tower was put in place this winter and early spring by hard working Friends of Mashkinonje like Harley and Liz Lang. The tower alone is a masterpiece in the woods and worth a visit. The question; how do you stand up 10- 25 foot beams that are 8 inch by 8 inch hemlock? To answer that secret; you will need to consult Harley.

Bring your binoculars and view from the top of the tower way-way-way across the lag, marsh, fen and bog to see an open pond with a heron rookery and seven nests. In the foreground watch for Sandhill cranes, 4 distinct pairs have been seen.

Let's back track; there are the two rock lookouts that are pretty nice before you even get to the peatland. If it is a sunny day – check the ponds for turtles – are they all painted turtles? Is that Joe-Pye weed growing on the rich soils of the beaver dam?

Oops, we are doing this trail backwards from the lookout tower back to the parking lot. We missed the 2006 blow-down forest and the smaller boardwalk that crosses the black ash swamp. If the season is

right check the swamp for nodding trilliums. You may wonder, what is the life cycle of a blow-down forest?

Not long after leaving the parking lot you will come to an extensive boardwalk with a lookout on the north east shore; one day this lookout will be accessible for people with disabilities. There is usually a nice breeze at the boardwalk. Look at all the fascinating aquatic plants up close or study the beaver house from the lookout. Keep a watchful eye for an American bittern, a bird that points its head in the air to look like a cattail. Unless it moves or calls during the mating season, it could be present and almost impossible to see.

It is hard to make it past the boardwalk, just so much to see. If the breeze is in the right direction, it is hard not to stop for a chat with your friends and perhaps stay for a snack. If the frogs are calling in the evening, ear plugs may be helpful.

Even before the boardwalk within a few meters of the parking lot, there are ponds that are of great interest in themselves. They seasonally dry up and as such do not support fish. There are species that like ponds with no fish, like wood frogs and salamanders (more about this in the previous newsletter). Now wood frogs in the mating season – there is an interesting tale.

Did those wood frog eggs make it this year? Were they eaten? Did the pond dry out too quickly? We might have to do another hike in a few days.

Is it worth the hike? "You bet!"

Why Wetlands are Important to Us

- Wetlands are a transition between aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. They absorb water, helping prevent flooding and shoreline erosion.
- Wetlands are a highly productive environment providing habitat for land and water species from ducks to orchids.
- Wetlands purify water, removing chemicals and sediment.
- Wetlands retain water and release water slowly to aid against drought.
- Wetlands produce as much oxygen per acre as an acre of rainforest.
- Wetlands are a paradise for nature lovers.

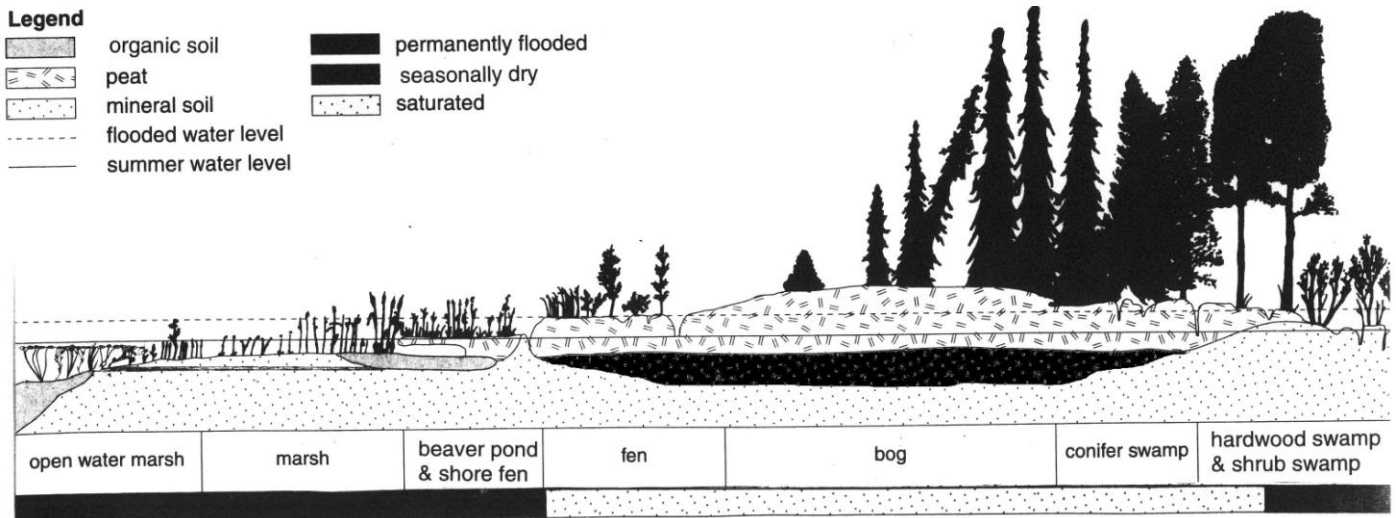
The Wetlands of Mashkinonje

Mashkinonje is over 2,000 hectares (4,000 acres) 38% of which is wetland. Lake Nipissing forms half of its perimeter. Wetlands play an important role in making Mashkinonje what it is. The wetlands are dispersed throughout the entire park with two provincially significant wetlands: Loudon Peatlands and Muskrat Creek.

We will focus on the Loudon Peatlands since its structure can be seen from the vantage of our new tower. Over 100,000 years ago when the glaciers receded, they gouged depressions in the bedrock. Over time water and sphagnum mosses gathered in the depressions. There were precious few nutrients in the water, the mosses flourished but slowly. The reason the **Peatlands** are called as such is because peat forms the base of all the wetland areas within the basin.

Plants began to grow on the peat but different plants grew in different areas. Just inside the basin is a stream called a “lag” or some think of it as the “moat around the castle.” The lag flows around the edge to a beaver pond that is controlled by a series of beaver dams. The water in the lag has some nutrients from the run off from the surrounding areas, providing for marsh plant growth. In the marsh portion, alders and cattails grow from the peat base. If you look farther into the center, you can see a change in the trees and plants; cattails are no longer present and tamarack trees can be seen, you are now looking at the fen. The fen is higher and dryer than the marsh, with sundew and orchids. Beyond the fen, the ecosystems changes again with the dominant tree being the black spruce; this is the bog. The bog is fed only by rain which is very poor in nutrients. This area is acidic, creating habitat for different plant life such as bog Rosemary and bog Laurel.

The Loudon Peatland provides you with an opportunity to see various habitats each with their own ecosystems flourishing side by side.



Did You Know?

- Wetlands are called “kidneys of the landscape”
- Wetlands are called “nature’s nurseries”
- Moss can absorb over 30 times its weight in water.
- It takes 100 years to form 2.5 cm or 1 inch of peat.

We hope that with this knowledge you will appreciate how important wetlands are to our lives and how beautiful wetlands can be.

New in Mashkinonje

Lots of changes occurred while the snow was on the ground this winter. Most of these projects got their start in the spring of 2008 – with the planning of grant applications – but the actual work on the ground got started in late winter and early spring while the ponds were still frozen and there was snow in the bush.

New Species at Risk Signs

The park will soon be displaying new trailhead signs highlighting the different wetland habitats and the associated species at risk that utilize those habitats. The signs were planned with the Friends Board with help from biologists and botanists.

We were very lucky to engage Christina Stoppa, a professional illustrator with an interest in nature, to develop some beautiful illustrations. The signs were then translated from English into French and set in a pleasing design. The signs should be in place by mid summer.



Trail Hardening – 400m of New Boardwalk

In the park on the west side of Highway #64 there were a number of areas that needed to be hardened to prevent damage to the sensitive vegetation along the trail. With assistance from the Municipality of French River, a grant was applied for and received through HRSDC. **Lucie Rochon** of the Municipality administered the grant that funded three workers, Kelly, Matt and Kim. The day to day field work occurred out of Friends, Harley & Liz's shop in North Monetteville. A "thank you" goes to the crew who worked in varying seasonal conditions from mid winter to late spring. The building materials were hauled in by snowmobile over frozen wetlands to protect the ecosystems from damage. Some areas required snow shovelling before construction; later, tall rubber boots were required, and finally, bug jackets.

We would also like to thank OLL crew member, Tiffany Young for her help.

One more season of boardwalk building and all the soft areas along the 36 km trails should be hardened.



New Lookout Tower at Loudon Peatlands

The Loudon Peatlands tower got a boost when the Shell Environmental Fund provided funds for building materials.

Doug Innes, Landscape Architect, from Ontario Parks Sudbury did up the plans. Building materials, however, do not a tower make – and this is where Harley and Liz come in – first fabricating the materials and staircases in their shop and then assembling the materials at the peatland. With a few Ontario Parks helpers and Gary Martin, and various snow-capable vehicles, the materials moved from the shop to the peatlands and the tower legs were stood on end. This was truly a Harley and Liz effort – thank you.

Forgetting the view from the tower – the tower alone is a master piece to see!



Friends of Mashkinonje

Share our Accomplishments

Thursday, September 17, 2009 1:00 pm

Location: Mashkinonje Provincial Park, Loudon Peatland parking lot, Hwy. 64 South
10 min south of Lavigne or north of Monetteville

Hike! Learn about our projects past, present, and future!



Winter Snowshoe Outing

By Angela Martin

Fifteen enthusiastic people were ready for an enjoyable day. Snow had fallen over night and continued in the morning. Some folks were concerned about the driving but all of their concerns were gone when snowshoeing in the fluffy snow. It was a winter wonderland in the Mashkinonje Provincial Park.

Six people left first for the 10 km snowshoe starting at the Blanding's Pond Access and the Samoset Trail. They went west to the Coastal Trail and back in land along the Atakas (old French for Cranberry) Trail. They traversed the beautiful country and saw moose and fox tracks. They snowshoed for over 5 exhilarating hours.

Nine people took the 3 km snowshoe to the Loudon Peatlands. They saw many beaver houses and dams; some with fox tracks. The highlight was the 12 nests in the Great Blue Heron rookery. Every nest was visited. At this time of year, they can be easily viewed without

disturbing anything. Our thoughts went to the return of the male herons, competition for the best nests, nest reconstruction, the return of the females and then their young. This group continued into the peatlands and observed the stunted tamarac and black spruce in this nutrient poor area. Poking through the snow were the pitcher-plant flowers, brown but still with seeds. It felt like another world, peaceful and beautiful.

Outing Maskinonje Park Loudon Peatlands May 3 2009

By Debra Johnson

Dr. Peter Beckett from the Biology Dept. of Laurentian University and Chuck Miller Superintendent of Mashkinonje and Killarney Parks joined an enthusiastic group of 8 Nipissing Naturalists and 8 people from the Monetville/Alban area. Bonnie, Debra, Fred, Claire, Sandra, Cal, and of course Angela and Gary, reveled in the spring sun under cloudless blue skies. The group included Joe Hamr, from Laurentian University who has previously led our club members on an outing to the Port Loring Deer yards and Harley Lang, a Friends of Mashkinonje member from the shore of the West Arm of Lake Nipissing, who has worked long industrious hours assisting the volunteers in building the bridges, board walks, and viewing tower in this park.

Peter is always an enthusiastic facilitator, reviewing the characteristics that differentiate bogs, fens, marshes and swamps while we viewed examples of each; in particular, the 8,000 year old bog of the Loudon Peatland. Along the 2.9 km. trail, we stopped to examine numerous examples of each and we spotted a shy Sandhill Crane camouflaged in the grasses and sedges at a pond edge.

Members marveled at the new **8 metre** viewing stand overlooking the Loudon Peatland. Many comments were overheard, on the prevalence of 5/8ths diameter bolts securing it and the sturdy, well-constructed platform, quelling any anxiety that we may have had as we climbed the 31 steps to the top.

From the platform we could see that the Great Blue Herons had returned and were on their nests in their rookery. Kestrels and hawks hunted the peatland. Peter commented that Southern Bog Lemmings have been documented in one area of this extensive peatland. Fred Pinto discussed the forest biodiversity and sustainability, as well as the survival of the large pines through fires which likely have swept through the area in the 19th century.



The first Mourning Cloaks and Spring Azure butterflies were plentiful along the trail, as well as fresh moose scat. Peter pointed out examples of symbiotic lichens, fungi and algae. False Morels were in evidence. At the edge of the marsh, salamander eggs were found as Painted Turtles sunned themselves.

I, for one, never tire of the beauty and biodiversity of Mashkinonje Park. Professional quality trail maps are now available for only \$5.00. Thanks to Peter, Fred, Angela and Chuck for making our outing as fascinating as ever.



Spring Marsh Monitoring

The spring saw the return of the deafening noise of evening frog calls in the park. These calls did not go unnoticed by Angela and Anna Sheppard who took a new look at the ponds and marshes and were successful in finding salamander and wood frog eggs in the ponds. Since it was a wet spring, the eggs may hatch before the ponds dry out.



We're Alive and Well!

The **red pines** given to us by Vermillion Forest Management Company Ltd. and planted August 29th, 2007 are growing well. Take a look at them around the quarry at the main Loudon Peatland parking lot.

Help the Friends

Buy a Bench

Some of our Friends of Mashkinonje have suggested that benches along the trails would be helpful and great for observing the surrounding area. We have a "Buy a Bench" plan at \$25 each. Think of the possibilities. Please ask one of our directors.



2008 Winner- Simon Pennellier of Toronto

2009 Canoe Raffle

Our 2008 raffle was such a success; we decided to hold a similar raffle again this year. This year's Langford canoe is a new model and can be viewed at the French River Visitors' Centre, so don't miss out. Tickets are \$5 each or 4 for \$20

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS Bob and Dianne Furchner

CONTACT US

We hope you enjoyed our newsletter. To view past editions, visit our website:

www.mashkinonje.com

or contact us at: Friends of Mashkinonje
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Thank you to our generous supporters

We would like to thank all of those who are helping Mashkinonje by contributing your time, finances, or items for the Silent Auction. Everything makes a difference.

A special thanks to **TJ and Monique Quesnel** of *Due North Marketing*. They have provided our website free since we set it up and now they have given us our very own domain name www.mashkinonje.com. This generosity allows us to put all our funds into the park.

2008 Donors

Moose Bog (\$500)

Chuck & Karen Miller
Harley & Liz Lang
Welcome Lodge
Barbara Parkinson CA - Collins Barrow
Due North Marketing

Cottongrass Fen (\$250)

Tamarac Swamp (\$100)

Dan Busch and Cendrine Gemberling
Peter Street, NFRM
Dave and Gail Geis
Rip and Elaine Drobeck
Ted & Grace Price

Muskrat Marsh (\$50)

Rusty and Brenda VanExan
Roseanna Rigo & Ray Sweezey
Chris & Sally Hicks
Tony and Sheila Studer

***Friends of Mashkinonje
Picnic and Annual General Meeting***

Sunday, August 16, 2009

Location: Welcome Lodge, Musky Island Rd. off Hwy. 64 South

11:00 am Annual General Meeting and Election of Officers (members only)

12:00 – 1:30 pm ***Silent Auction***

If you have anything to contribute to the Silent Auction, please bring it!

12:00 Lunch: Corn Roast, Fish Fry, Desserts, or bring your own

2:00 pm ***Martin Pond Trail Hike***

For further information, contact Liz Lang: (705) 898-2108, Angela Martin (705) 594-1153

Thank you for being a Friend
