

11 Parks and Nature Reserves

Rural Ogden

The Municipality of Ogden is a profoundly rural territory. Some of our 19th and turn-of-the-century villages such as Tomifobia, Graniteville and Lineboro may have once had urban pretensions, with their stores, post offices, hotels, train stations, mills, schools and churches, but the 20th century and the automobile laid to rest any such ambitions, instead facilitating a gradual devolution into what are the residential hamlets that exist today. The automobile also dramatically and permanently changed the nature of our shoreline, as Montrealers and other urbanites found their way to Ogden and built, almost elbow to elbow, a continuous embankment of cottages. Yes, Ogden is entirely rural (and unique in that regard within the MRC Memphremagog), but it is certainly not wilderness. No teenager or adult person has gotten lost (just temporarily disoriented perhaps) in our woods since the first half of the 1800s. Our network of roads and the lake itself, set a limit on that possibility.

However, there are significant spaces within our territory that have been thoughtfully set aside for the benefit of the public, and that have allowed nature to remain as such, or to recuperate somewhat from our human intrusions. Some of these spaces retain an aspect of the wild, and all have a striking natural beauty. Five of these spaces are described in more detail in the separately authored articles that make up this chapter.

Public benefit

The public benefit of some of these spaces is immediate and with few restrictions as to access and use. **Weir Memorial Park** on the shores of Lake Memphremagog at Cedarville, is a three-season public park of 7 acres conceived in the 1950s to facilitate swimming, boating, camping, and community gatherings, particularly for local residents who otherwise had no lake access. The Park is built on former farmland and features a restored shoreline and beach that used to be the public highway! The 19 km long **Tomifobia Nature Trail** links Beebe with Ayers Cliff and runs for about 9 km through Ogden. It was developed in the early 1990s through the repurposing of the former CPR rail bed, and passes along the Tomifobia River valley through scenic riparian, wetland and pasture habitats, rich in flora and fauna. The longer term public benefit is the protection of these adjacent habitats. The trail is open to the public on a four-season basis, restricted to pedestrian and non-motorized vehicles.

Some spaces have more limited access and certainly profound restrictions on how they can be used. The **Marlington Bog**, a wetland area surrounded by forest, is owned by the Nature Conservancy of Canada. This truly unique and fragile habitat has always been wild and since the 1990s has been protected. The public benefit is immediate in terms of education, and the simple pedestrian enjoyment

of observing and photographing nature in an entirely non-intrusive manner. Visits to the bog must be led by a guide, and access is limited to the forest trail and boardwalk within the wetland itself. Guided visits are available from late spring through early fall. The **Michael Dunn Biodiversity Reserve** is a large block of land extending to the shore of Lake Memphremagog, and nestled against the Vermont border. It consists of secondary forest developed on former farmland, along with some wetland, plus lake shoreline of just over 1 km in length that is essentially wild, and which never saw any significant development. There is no prohibition on public access, but the trails are few, not maintained in any fashion, and there are no amenities on the property. No camping or fires are permitted, and day use (only) should be limited to those activities that do no harm to the habitat and leave no trace. The immediate public benefit is the enjoyment of nature and the spectacular shoreline scenery. The longer term benefit is the conservation of this Lake Memphremagog watershed habitat as it progressively returns to nature, and the protection of what is a relatively rare phenomenon, wild shoreline along the Lake. Unfortunately overuse and abuse by some members of the public are currently putting this space in some jeopardy.



The final space has no public access, but the long term public benefit is immeasurable. The **Tompkins Creek Private Natural Reserve** protects about 51 hectares of wetland and adjacent forest surrounding Tompkins Creek. This wetland is one of only three large wetland areas on the Canadian side that drain into Lake Memphremagog. Not only are these critical wetlands important habitats, but they serve as vital biological filters that protect the lake itself from nutrient loading and premature eutrophication (i.e. the decline and effective death of a freshwater lake).

As Ogden residents we are very fortunate to have these five parks and/or nature reserves. Now let us explore them a little more closely!

Weir Memorial Park

contribution by Bill May

Located just south of Ogden's city hall in the Cedarville area, Weir Memorial Park (WMP) is one of the very rare public spaces on the shores of Lake Memphremagog. It provides access to the lake for local residents, the vast majority of whom don't own property on its shoreline. The seven acre lakeside site was a bequest of Squadron Leader Ronald Weir (1901-1944), who died at Bazenville, Normandy at one of the first airbases established by the Allies in occupied France after the D-Day landings.



Oblique aerial view of Weir Memorial Park towards the northwest, taken in 2015. Outline of park in dashed yellow. Inset, the memorial monument, dedicated on May 24th, 1999

Ronald Weir

Starting with Alexander Magoon in 1800, a succession of farming families owned the shoreline property that now makes up WMP. In 1931, the old Joseph Bullis farm was purchased by then 30 year old Ronald Weir, a Montrealer.

Weir's family had been vacationing in Cedarville every summer since 1895, and the area had captivated him. He studied engineering at McGill and had been employed for many years in surveying hydroelectric transmission lines in northern Quebec. By 1932 he was working for Imperial Oil as a lubricants specialist. He was a very practical man and had a passion for radios, telephone and electrical systems, and anything hydraulic or mechanical, especially internal combustion engines. He liked to go fast in a car or in a boat, and when the opportunity finally arose in 1939, in a plane. With a friend he jointly acquired a small plane and would fly it out to the Lake and land on the mowed fields of what is now WMP. He would hire local lads to sleep under the plane's wing at night to discourage vandals or souvenir hunters!

Ronald had ambitious plans for his Ogden farm with its extensive waterfront, but never had sufficient money or time to fully pursue his dreams. Cottage development around Echo Bay was initiated by Ron, and he installed the telephone and water supply systems that connected the various cabins.

When war broke out Ron joined the RCAF and eventually rose to the rank of Squadron Leader as a pilot/engineer. He was initially stationed out of Winnipeg, then Ottawa and although he was too old for active combat, Ron persuaded his superiors to allow him to go overseas. This wish was granted in early 1944. He joined 127 Wing in southern England prior to the D-Day landings and by June 10th was based at an advanced landing ground (ALG B-2) in central Normandy providing air support for the beachhead. He was killed on August 6th 1944 test flying a Spitfire fighter while still at this base



*Squadron Leader
Ronald S. Weir (1901 – 1944)*

History and mandate of WMP

The Park was established by Weir descendents in the memory of the Honourable Robert Stanley Weir, his wife Margaret Douglas Weir, and their two sons, Captain Douglas Weir and Squadron Leader Ronald Weir. The Weir boys perished while in service of their country, one in each of the two great World Wars. The donors of the property loved this area and desired that others should enjoy some of the pleasures that they and their departed loved ones held so close to their hearts.

The executors of Ron Weir's estate started planning the Park in the early 1950s. This required negotiations with the province to reroute the old highway that then hugged the shoreline. The park officially opened to the public on August 22nd, 1959, to a great deal of local fanfare and enthusiasm.

The property is owned by **Weir Memorial Park Inc.**, a registered private corporation and charitable organization established on May 26th, 1956. There are nine shareholders of the corporation, eight of whom are either community organizations or local municipal corporations, with the ninth being the Weir family itself. A volunteer board of directors, elected annually, runs the park.

The perennial challenge for WMP was, and remains, the raising of sufficient funds to maintain and improve the park and its programs. A variety of projects have been undertaken over the years in order to attempt to generate revenue, ranging from snack bars to mini-putt, but only camping revenues (starting in 1964) have proven sustainable, if controversial. The small profit from camping allowed the park to hire a lifeguard for the first time in 1987, a provincial requirement in order for swimming to be allowed. In 1989 a new community hall with washrooms was built, and in 1999, under the leadership of Barbara Thompson and her team, a major facelift of the Park took place which included tree planting, the erection of gates and the Weir memorial monument. Since the 2000s, the focus of WMP's efforts has largely been on the environment. The shoreline was buttressed and then revegetated, and a new septic system was installed.

Ronald Weir's legacy and contribution to the community, continues to be enjoyed by hundreds, summer after summer.

Marlington Bog

contribution by SCENE

The Marlington Bog is a remarkable physiographic, hydrographic and biological wetland landscape in the heart of Ogden. It is estimated that the formation of the bog and its individual components began over 10,000 years ago, shortly following the retreat of the glaciers. In a depression on the landscape with limited drainage, a unique suite of stagnant water-loving flora developed. The decomposition of organic matter over the centuries led to a thick carpet of peat about 6 meters (20 feet) thick, increasing by a few millimeters each year.

A history of conservation

The Marlington Bog almost disappeared completely. The original owner of the site had at one point planned to operate the bog commercially by harvesting the peat moss. He hoped that his neighbor, Mr. Albert Elliott, would allow him to use the creek running through Elliott's property in order to drain the site. The authorization was not granted and the project was abandoned.



Drone photograph of Mud Pond, part of the Marlington Bog. View towards northeast.



Photo credit Tom Montgomery

In 1972, Mr. Joel Andress purchased the land for protection purposes and donated it to the **Nature Conservancy of Canada** in 1992. That same year, citizens formed the *Elliandress Corporation*, which undertook under lease to preserve the peat bog and use it to educate the public. We can thank Albert Elliott for opposing the commercial development of the site, and maintaining this unique natural legacy.



Ogden pioneers of environmental stewardship. At left, Joel M. Andress (1931-2013), at right Albert J. Elliott (1917-2001).

1993: the building of the first boardwalk to the bog. From l to r, Harry Isbrucker, John Henderson, Hugh Lebaron, & Jean-Luc Masson

A truly unique eco-system

The property includes a large sphagnum peat bog, a pond ("Mud Pond") fed by small streams, a swamp and a maple grove. The vegetation varies from one environment to the other. There are two types of bogs; they are either ombrotrophic or minerotrophic. In the case of ombrotrophic bogs, the main water supply comes from rain and snow, whereas in minerotrophic bogs or *fens*, water from springs or streams predominant.

From the dragonfly bridge one can observe a vegetation similar to that of a minerotrophic fen due to the presence of Blue Flag irises, bul-rushes, water lilies, cattails and sedges. A bit further lies the ombrotrophic bog, composed of a thick mat of brown sphagnum moss where one can find Labrador tea, broad-sheathed cottongrass, and lichens. Finally, some plants, such as smilacins, kalmias, and the carnivorous sundews and pitcher plants, are found in both bog and fen.

In July 2017, a new group of citizen volunteers founded the Society for Conservation and Education of Nature (SCENE) to manage the bog. Please see their website.



www.lascene.org

Michael Dunn Biodiversity Reserve

The shoreline of Lake Memphremagog is almost entirely in private hands. Public access is extremely limited and certainly no significant stretch of “wild” shoreline exists that explicitly permits the public to visit that is with the exception of the Michael-Dunn Biodiversity Reserve.

Located on both sides of the border with the United States, this reservation was very generously bequeathed in part to the State of Vermont and in part to the Province of Quebec by the late Michael Dunn, his will stipulating “*that the donated lands be held for conservation, public use and recreation*”. The portion of the reserve in Ogden covers 117 hectares (293 acres) and is the responsibility of the Ministère du Développement durable, de l’Environnement et de la Lutte contre les changements climatiques. A similar sized area of the Dunn bequest lies south of the border. Here the natural reserve is called the Eagle Point Wildlife Management Area and is owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. This article will only discuss the Ogden portion of the reserve, which is at present entirely undeveloped.

The property

The Dunn property had been in the same family for five generations! Michael Dunn’s great-great grandfather was Thomas Blackadder who farmed on this land from the 1830s through to near the close of the 19th century. On the primitive cadastral in existence before 1897, the land formed part of Lot 1, Range 4 (see map) and it was first cleared and farmed in 1796 by Jonathan Leavitt Magoon (1755-1826), who came from Exeter, New Hampshire. However, after working the thin soils for twenty years, in 1816 Jonathan moved on to what became known as Magoon’s Point. Thomas Blackadder married in 1835 and may have acquired the property around this date. Blackadder also leased granite quarry rights to his land, and the scar of an old quarry exists just inland from the shore, opposite Gull Rock. Another site on the property of historical significance is an engraved rock outcrop inscribed in 1845, recording the location of both the borderline as well as the position of a temporary astronomical observatory station established by the British Boundary Commission. In 1913 and 1929, the Munderloh family (Blackadder’s grandson) purchased an additional 122 acres of adjacent land to the north, including “Thomas Mower Martin” or “Blueberry” Point.

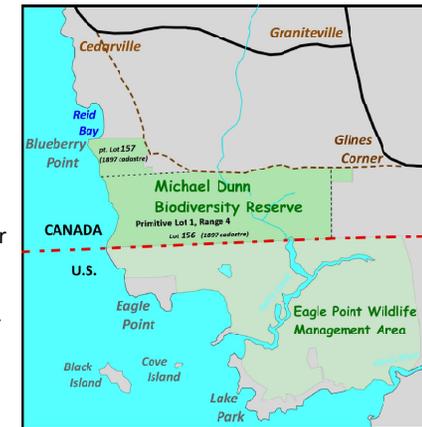
Michael Dunn (1942 - 2007)

A former Montrealer, Dunn had been a resident of Vermont since 1978, living at Eagle Point on the Lake. He was an avid art and rare book collector, and travelled the world pursuing these passions. Described as a convivial, delightful bon vivant he made friends wherever he went and generously served the local community. He died suddenly of a heart attack in Switzerland.



The natural heritage

The Reserve is largely forested (100 ha), the remaining land consisting of pastures, a small stream, a pond and a wetland that extends into the American part of the reserve. A partial survey of trees and plants was conducted in 2010 and indicated four different forest groupings but the dominant grouping (40 percent) was composed of sugar maple with other shade-tolerant species. Most visitors are struck by the lovely stands of white pine and hemlock along the shoreline.



Overall the reserve contains a richly diverse assemblage of trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants and fungi, typical of the Lake Memphremagog Depression ecological district - a delight for naturalists, photographers and nature-lovers in general.



The shoreline of the Dunn Reserve, with its access to and spectacular views of the lake, has proven a mecca for boaters and swimmers for decades. However, the noise, crowding and litter often spoil this beautiful natural setting.

Tompkins Creek Wetland

contribution by Peter Lepine

Having spent every summer since 1965 in the direct vicinity of the Tompkins Creek wetland, I have come to appreciate its beauty, its wildness, and the ecological services that it provides to the area. Many others have explored and enjoyed Tompkins Creek as it is a popular canoeing and kayaking area, with many beaver dams and lodges along its length. In 1990, a group of cottage owners on Descente 14 purchased the Mann farm, a tract of 60 hectares, mostly wooded, that includes a significant portion of the Tompkins Creek wetland. This was done mainly to keep the land out of the hands of a developer – the previous year, several large tracts of lake front land had been purchased by developers and subdivided (for example, Descentes 5 and 18).

In 2014, with the help of *Memphremagog Conservation Inc.*, we created the **Réserve Naturelle Privée du Ruisseau Tompkins** on 51 of the 60 hectares of the property. This ensures that these 51 hectares are protected from any kind of development in perpetuity.



Drone photograph of Tompkins Creek in the winter looking east.

Photo credit Niels Jensen

The Tompkins Creek wetland is one of only three large wetland areas on the Canadian side of the lake, the others being the Cherry River wetland and the Bunker wetland. The Tompkins Creek wetland is an important habitat for a variety of vulnerable species of flora and fauna. It is considered an excellent waterfowl nesting area, as well as being designated a muskrat habitat, and is part of a white-tailed deer wintering area. Species observed there include painted and snapping turtles, beaver, muskrat, river otter, mink, deer, moose, herons, ospreys, bald eagles, and many different species of waterfowl.



Ground-level view towards south from Davis Road of Tompkins Creek in early spring.

It is also a part of a larger wetland complex that includes rare peat bogs (Kertland Creek, a tributary to Tompkins Creek has its headwaters adjacent to Marlinton Bog), and that lie within one of only two unbroken forest tracts of more than 400 hectares within Ogden.

Its importance in helping to protect the Lake by filtering out sediments and nutrients cannot be overstated. Phosphates and nitrates, both from the natural decay (recycling) of organic matter, as well as from agricultural fertilizers, make their way towards the lake bound onto very small (clay-sized) sediment particles. If they reach our lake in large concentrations, say during periods of high run-off, they cause unrestricted growth of cyanobacteria (algal blooms). The wetlands are vital in trapping the sediment (and hence the nutrients).

The entire wetland is in private hands, and the eastern portion of the wetland is zoned white. Little of it is protected from development. However, there is currently a moratorium on development of properties that include wetland areas as well as an effort at the MRC level to better delimit and protect wetlands throughout the MRC's territory. Public hearings on this subject are expected in 2022.

Tomifobia Nature Trail

contribution by Michael Sudlow

In 1988 the train whistle echoed across the Tomifobia Valley for the last time – the endnote to the rise and gradual decline of a local rail line that had served the valley for over a century. Today, evidence of the prosperity injected by the railroad into what is now the sleepy hamlet of Tomifobia are hard to find; the former station, hotel, creamery, general store, garage and two places of worship have all disappeared or been repurposed. But the valley’s lifeline did not die with the railway. Pedal power has replaced that of steam locomotives along this corridor that links Ayer’s Cliff at kilometre zero with Beebe Plain, 19 km to the south.

“Sentier Massawippi Inc.” (SMI), a volunteer, non-profit organization and charity, was responsible for introducing new blood to this abandoned artery of the Canadian Pacific Railway system. The rail to trail conversion was completed in 1993. SMI maintains the property for year round activities by bikers, hikers, joggers, bird watchers, cross country skiers and dogs on a leash. The basically smooth flat terrain is ideal for adventurous seven to seventy-seven year olds to exercise whilst glimpsing nature’s wonders.



Imagine observing a dozen turtles sunbathing on a log raft, a blue heron swooping to spear a fish, and a pair of bald eagles eagerly eyeing up their supper! all on a typical summer’s afternoon at Knight’s Pond or Doré Marsh half way down the trail.

Sentier Massawippi has also purchased three adjacent properties in recent years to expand the nature experience further from the gravelled track and permit more intimate observations of nature closer to habitats. Although “Sentier Massawippi” remains the official title of ownership, “Tomifobia Nature Trail / Sentier Nature Tomifobia” is its unofficial moniker.



For history buffs, relics from the railroading era include four steel bridges, a trestle, and four cattle tunnels. At kilometre 13.5 there is also a memorial to the two engineers who perished in a derailment at this spot.

Birdwatchers tend to flock to the middle of the trail, between Curtis and Laflamme Roads (kilometre 8 to 12) where the proximity of ponds, marshes and the river attract a wide variety of species. Vehicle parking at both ends of this section has recently been expanded.



The rest area at km 16.7, “Medicine Wheel and the Four Directions”, acknowledges the former indigenous inhabitants of this region. Here, four engraved stellae at the points of the compass explain the symbolic link of four wild animals to the stages of life, from birth to death.



A large gathering of painted turtles enjoy the sun at the meander bend near Sleeper Creek along Sentier Nature Tomifobia. Inset, a Great Egret hunting at Knight's Pond.

The anomaly of a private trail owned by approximately 250 contributing members, but partially funded by a half dozen municipalities, yet open freely to the general public means that the Tomifobia Nature Trail’s existence is never guaranteed. Many users of this priceless natural corridor express their appreciation by making donations or becoming members. More details are available on the website: www.sentiernaturetomifobia.org.