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"The crucial resource needed for life is freshwater"

"Canadians still enjoy their water heritage but preserving it for future generations is important too...."

O.P. water system combines three leading water technologies; Simpson Environmental, OZZ Corporation, Water King, and is one of the most effective and responsible processes of ensuring fresh drinking water for the future.

Water retains all the healthy minerals without adding sodium.

Cambridge's Grand River:..... by James Ellsworth, a freelance writer living in Cambridge, ONt.



Cambridge's Grand River:

Ronald Wright who delivered the 2004 CBC Massey Lecture entitled "A Short History of Progress" wrote "The lesson I read the past is this: that the health of land and water - and of woods, which are the keepers of water - can be the only lasting basis for any civilization's survival and success."

Many great cities have a river focus: Prague has the River Vltava that passes under the historic Charles Bridge, Paris has the Seine flowing past Notre Dame, and the Arno of Florence graced Leonardo daVinci's landscapes. Our city may not have the grandeur of those others but we do have the Grand about us. Actually, our association with this river binds us to nature and fellow humans in a kind of historical memory, flowing down through the ages. Our riverscape, if we take pause to reflect, beats through our veins in a riparian pulse, usually good and sometimes not.

Rivers have long been the magnet of communal living, offering food and water. The Grand River winds 290 kilometres and together with its tributaries, the Nith, the Conestogo, the Speed and Eramosa Rivers, it drains almost 7,000 square kilometres, one of the largest watersheds in southern Ontario. Like myriad lifelines on a giant palm, the Grand has offered its open hand to

countless communities and generations. A unique Carolinian forest borders the river in an almost unbroken 20-kilometre strip below Cambridge. A glacial topography of rolling mounds gives rise to many habitat types, described as extensive uplands and swamp forest, bogs in kettle depressions, fens, remnants of prairie and oak savannah, sycamore and sassafras plus a variety of birds from turkey vultures to the majestic bald eagle. And if we are, as many believe, linked to an ancestral heritage of locale, then we are bound to the Grand in many ways - past, present, and most importantly, future.

Many have passed along these riverbanks. One resource claims the diversity of cultures along the Grand River today reflects the patchwork of ethnic groups that together define Canada's identity. Long before immigrants arrived, native cultures prospered near the Grand. Some 820 archaeological sites bear evidence of their occupation. Paleo-Indian hunted mastodon and bison here, 7000 - 11,000 years ago. Other hunting peoples followed, but by 900 A.D., the Woodlands People were growing tobacco, corn, then beans and squash, and later sunflowers. These were Iroquois-speaking communities, living in longhouse villages no larger than 1500 people and relocating every 10-30 years as the soil and game mandated. The Huron lived along Georgian Bay and the upper reaches of the Grand River; the Seneca, or 'Keepers of the Western Door', and the Erie dwelt below Lakes Ontario and Erie; while the Neutral or Attiwandaronks ranged along the Grand River.

By 1609, the Frenchman, Samuel de Champlain had embroiled the area in a fur trading rivalry - the Huron supplying the French and the southern Iroquois dealing with the English. Beaver were plentiful in the swampy forests along the Grand and the Neutral supplied both sides with beaver pelts. Quite naturally the Grand River was a major trade route to both the Georgian Bay Huron and the St. Lawrence Iroquois. However, by 1630 Grand River natives had succumbed to Huron domination and were officially part of the Huron trade, sending 10 to 12,000 pelts to Montreal each year.

Quickly the native populations became dependent on traded goods that the beaver pelts brought in - iron knives, kettles, axes, and metal arrowheads. In fact the Huron felt that they had become so dependent that if they went two years without trading for European goods then their skills and culture would be ruined. Perhaps that is why they guarded their trade monopoly with the French and Jesuits in particular. In 1626, a rival to the Jesuits, a Récollet priest, Joseph de La Roche Daillon, visited the Neutral along the Grand and tried to negotiate a direct alliance between the Neutral and the French. The Huron heard of the plan and forced the Grand River Neutral to end the talks and send Daillon away into the forest, alone. In 1633, the famous coureur de bois, Etienne Brulé, was murdered along the Grand when once again the Huron learned he was trying to get the Seneca and Neutral to trade directly with Montreal and bypass them. Technology and religion further complicated the issue in 1640. While the New Englanders were trading guns for furs to the southern Iroquois, the Jesuits wanted the French to use a similar trade policy but only to those who converted to Christianity. When European diseases like small pox and measles broke out among the natives, it was devastating. It is estimated that half the population died, mainly children and elders, which threw native culture along the river into turmoil.

Tensions rose. There were increasing raids for furs and for captives who could be adopted to replace reduced populations. In 1647 things reached a boiling point when the Seneca accused the Neutral along the Grand of allowing a Seneca warrior to be pursued and murdered by Huron when he was within sight of a Neutral longhouse village. He deserved hospitality and protection according to custom they said. The Neutral were caught between a rock and a hard place in the dispute between the Huron and the St. Lawrence Iroquois.

The crisis finally came to a head in 1649. Half of the total St. Lawrence Iroquois fighting force, 1000 Seneca and Mohawk, moved across Lake Ontario and up portions of the Grand River trails and attacked the Huron and the Jesuit

missionaries at Ste. Marie (Midland). One whole Huron nation, the Tahontaenrat, who lived at Orr Lake near Elmvale, escaped south and joined the Neutral. The Iroquois, fearing a revival of the Huron-Neutral-French alliance and remembering the murdered Seneca warrior, next attacked the Neutral, who were no match for superior numbers and guns. They were killed, dispersed or adopted and the Grand River Valley remained an uninhabited hunting area for another half century.

It may be poetic license, but sometimes when the wind moans in the trees along the river's edge, it may be the spirit of Father Daillon wandering alone in the forest; or when a bald eagle shrieks, it may be the spirit of the murdered Seneca warrior. And when we are using the stone dust rail trail or canoeing on the Grand, remember that you are merely sharing the Grand River with the Attiwandaronk Neutral who plied this area before you.

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