

Community history

Speaking with local farmer Jarrett Switzer about his love for growing food at his family's farm on Clear Lake Road in Bancroft, it was great to see how passionately connected he was to his work.

When I asked him what he loved most about growing fruit and vegetables he said he equally valued the entire process.

Tilling and preparing the soil, planting, caring for, harvesting and selling his produce all brings him great joy.

Listening to him speak about how well he knows the land around what was once his great grandparents' farm, I thought about how incredible of a feeling it must be for Switzer and his family to reminisce about all of the stories their family has created in that space. I think about the memories that I have created in the eight years since I have lived here in the same space, and some of them seem so long ago already.

I couldn't imagine how deep his family's roots run on that land now after four generations of Switzers' have acted as its steward. Inspired by our conversation afterwards while driving home from the Bancroft Farmers' Market I decided to take the back roads home to enjoy a little of the natural history on my way.

When cruising on these less familiar paths through the North Hastings Highlands I have found all sorts of historic destinations that I would have otherwise likely never have noticed.

When I first moved here one of my favourite things to do was to turn onto some poorly marked logging road leading back into the forest to see where it takes me.

Since taking up this pastime I have found and photographed numerous abandoned farms, mills, homes, and cemeteries that are hidden just below the surface while off the beaten path.

Anyone who has found themselves on such unstable trails knows that the less walked paths tend not to be paths of least resistance.

I remember the sinking feeling that came from realizing this the first time I went looking for the Umfraville Cemetery in early spring of 2010.

At one point after getting stuck in the season's first mud puddle I thought I was going to have to hike my way out, or start a very long walk home.

Luckily a helpful soul wandered along with his dog, strangely enough just in time to help push me out before dark.

I never did get their names or find the cemetery that day. I did manage to locate it later that fall. This time with the road nice and dry it was well worth the trek.

Looking around I could see much more than tombstones.

The remnants of what looked either to be a large farmstead, or a small village popped up through grass.

Most of it had completely been reclaimed by the earth, however, the building's remains revealed tiny clues to the history of this once thriving place.

- Nate Smelle