

Making history



By Nate Smelle

DROPPING BY SILENT LAKE Provincial Park on Saturday, Aug. 8 for the Eco-scavenger hunt was pleasantly surprised to discover a group of more than 60 people exploring and enjoying the landscape together. Hosted by members of the Bancroft Field Naturalists Club and the Bancroft Area Stewardship Council this annual event is intended to help children and families establish a stronger connection with their environment and with each other.

Following their search the excited young citizen scientists emerged from the forest frantically waving their checklists of observations as if they had just discovered a new species or a dinosaur. As the happy mob swarmed the display table to tell the event's coordinator Betty Coutu what they had found, she congratulated everyone on their discoveries and handed out prizes and educational materials regarding local wildlife and conservation initiatives. From the amount of ear to ear smiles on the faces of the people returning from their morning scavenge it was obvious that what I was witnessing was memories being made.

Watching parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and guardians light up as their beloved young ones made their own discoveries, it was plain to see how valuable this experience was for participants of all ages.

Scanning over the information pamphlets from the Eco-scavenger Hunt later that night I came across a small booklet from the Ontario Children's Outdoor Charter entitled, Discovering the wonders of nature. Encouraging children to write about their favourite outdoor activities the booklet is also a checklist to help kids keep track of the things they have seen and done, and the things they hope to do outside.

Looking back on my youth all of my best memories came from experiences that I had outdoors. It is not the moments I spent staring at a television or computer screen that I reminisce about most; instead my most memorable childhood moments are the ones I spent snorkeling, paddling, hiking and riding my bike or board. Events like the Eco-scavenger Hunt that bring people together to experience nature as a family, and as a community, help us take back our few remaining spare moments from the grip of technology. The hyper-connectivity of the online world often overwhelms us with a wave of both useless and useful information. The more information that comes in, the more time we need to spend processing it. As we sift through and divide the facts from fiction we waste as much time as we gain. While we are informing ourselves and others about important matters, we at the same time we distract ourselves from the moment-at-hand.

Putting down your cell phone and getting outdoors to swim, paddle a canoe, count butterflies, hike, watch birds or do whatever activity it is that enjoy most is the first step in making some real long lasting connections with nature. Enjoying such experiences with your loved ones is a sure fire way to brew up a little of your own history in the making.