

Step back in time in an old-growth forest

SHAW WOODS OFFERS TRANQUILITY AND WONDER

BY GRANT DOBSON

Old growth forests are rare in eastern Canada, particularly near big cities, but there's one just an hour's drive west of Ottawa, virtually untouched since European explorers first ventured up the Ottawa River.

It's called Shaw Woods, and walking into it is a journey back in time, giving visitors a glimpse of the 17th-century Ottawa Valley.

A first-time visitor will be amazed simply by the height of the trees. The lowest branches of many of these maple, beech and hemlock (some more than two centuries old) are as high as the canopy of many woodlots around Ottawa.

The woods first opened to the public in the 1970s. More recently, a not-for-profit group of local volunteers has expanded the trail network, built boardwalks over sensitive areas and developed a self-guided interpretive program.

As in any old growth forest, there



are many dead trees, some standing, others fallen over along the trails. This is no sign of an unhealthy forest. In fact, very much the opposite is true. These "casualties" provide habitat and recycle nutrients

to create a living space for a host of other plants and animals.

You can best absorb the intrinsic value of this place during a quiet walk along one of the six trails, a 7.5-kilometre network meandering through wetlands and forest and along the Snake River and Doré Scarp to a scenic lookout. It's a great place to stop for a break and maybe

observe the comings and goings of a nesting pair of bald eagles. Their enormous stick nest is visible high up in a white pine across Shaw's Pond, created in 1847 to provide for water power for a grist and sawmill.

The secretive Canadian lynx is a rare northern mammal which makes its home here. In spring, the chorus of wood warblers against a backdrop of wildflowers, ferns and fungi attracts birdwatchers and naturalists from around the region.

Two interpretive map-guides illuminate the connections between the biological, geological and human histories of the land.

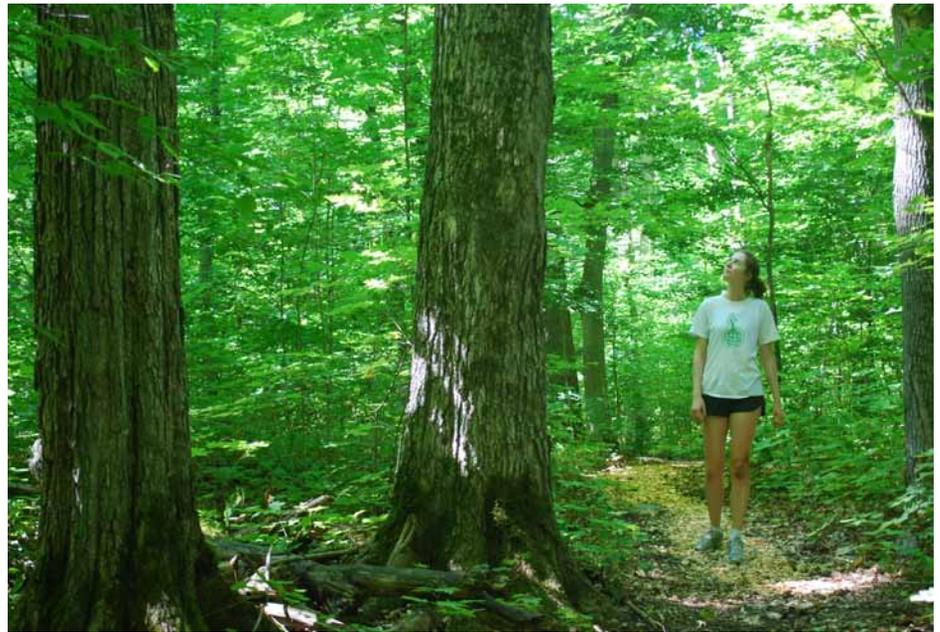
These woods are named for the Shaw family, who lived here for many years and still allow public access to the 50 hectares of old-growth forest and an adjacent



160 hectares of bush. John Shaw, a Scottish miller, and his wife Barbara Thompson arrived with their two-year-old son by canoe from Bytown in 1847. Mammoth grist stones remain near their dam on the Snake River, a destination for settlers who would leave home at dawn, walk up to 20 kilometres with a 30-kilogram bag of grain on their back, and return by nightfall with the ground flour.

For thousands of years before that, the river linked Algonquin people living along the shores of Lake Doré with the rest of the Ottawa River watershed. Seldom traveled today, the Snake makes for an interesting day trip and wildlife viewing for the adventurous flat-water paddler. But put in your boat during high-water season and be prepared for pullouts for beaver dams and fallen trees.

If you launch at Lake Doré there is a free parking lot, a nice beach on shallow water, and plenty of room for picnics. Doré's claim to



fame is it's the world's largest inland freshwater lake without an island.

From the parking lot, paddle north to the outlet of Snake River and then on through Shaws Pond (the old maps skip the apostrophe) and downriver as far as you wish to explore. Several short portages are required.

Directions: From Ottawa take Highway 17 west to Cobden. Turn left at Main Street (which becomes Eganville Road/County Road 8) and continue for 12.3 kilometres to a stop sign. Turn right onto Bulger Road, then left into the Shaw Woods parking lot at 2065 Bulger Road.

To continue on to Lake Doré from the Shaw Woods trailhead, go one kilometre north on Bulger Road to Highway 41. Turn left, then almost immediately right at Township Park Road. Park, and take the short walk to the lake.

~ Grant Dobson is a volunteer director at Shaw Woods Outdoor Education Centre Inc.

Whether you stop in for an hour's walk or a whole day, it's free. There's more info, trail maps, and guides at shawwoods.ca.

