

Native Orchid News:

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Members' Night

Friday October 27, 2006

Plant of the Month

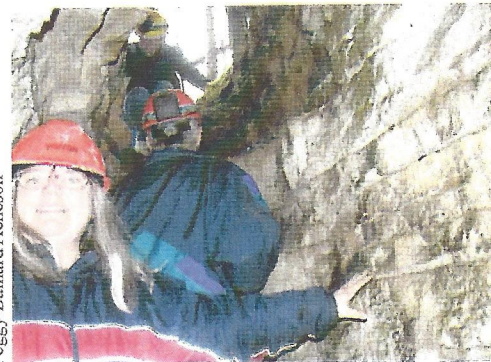
Goldthread

(*Coptis trifolia*)



Peggy Bainard Acheson

Entrance to Moosearm Pit



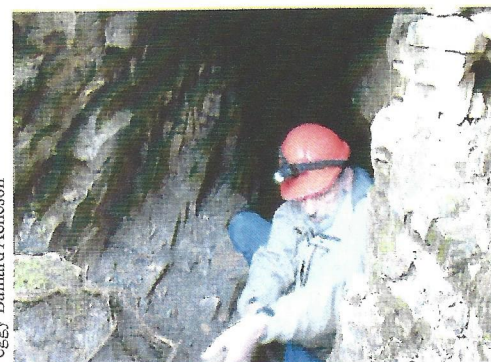
Peggy Bainard Acheson

Doris, Hugo, Iris Reimer



Peggy Bainard Acheson

Doris emerging from Moosearm Pit



Peggy Bainard Acheson

Eugene Reimer using rope to climb

The above four photos accompany the article on Page 4.

President's Report

By Doris Ames

It's a relief to have rain and cooler weather after such a hot dry summer but that warm sunny weather made people think about going on field trips and I think we had a record attendance this year. Thanks very much Iris for doing such a great job of organizing those trips.

We have also been busy working hard on our latest project, which is collecting orchid seeds for long-term storage in the national seed bank in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The hot and dry weather wasn't the best for orchid seed production (although they bloomed beautifully) but we made a good start on it. With Dr. Richard St-Pierre's help, we built wire cages to help protect selected plants and after August 15 we managed to collect seed capsules from 17 kinds of orchids.

We also made some interesting and productive survey trips this year and the one where four of us drove up to Grand Rapids at the end of May was really a lot of fun. (See article on Page 4.) We found 8 species of orchid in bloom and 4 different locations and thanks to Dale Brown of the Speleological Society of Manitoba we got to explore a cave in the marvellous karst formation as well as visit many of the other prominent features of the proposed new Manitoba Lowlands National Park. These included Little Limestone Lake, Long Point and Sturgeon Gill Lake. For more information on the proposed park in the Interlake region you may contact Canadian Parks and Wilderness, and to learn more about the unusual karst formation I heartily recommend a book called "Caves and Karst in Manitoba's Interlake Region" second edition 2000 written by the Speleological Society of Manitoba. It is available from the University of Winnipeg bookstore.

NOCI held an orchid festival in conjunction with Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre on June 3 and 4. Displays on all things orchid, quizzes, games and slide shows were available. It was followed by an interpreted field trip to the Brokenhead Wetland Ecological Reserve on June 24. Those people who attended enjoyed it very much.

Please be sure to attend our upcoming Members Night on Friday, October 27. (See Peg's notice below). We will have new displays, prizes and interesting speakers and Marie-Ann Reeves has promised to bake a cake so you don't want to miss it. If you have any items suitable for prizes that you might like to donate please contact Peggy.

NOCI Sixth Annual Members' Night

Plan to attend our upcoming Members' Night on Friday, October 27! We are excited to have Carl Smith, Cultural Director for Brokenhead Ojibway Nation and CEO of the Manitoba Model Forest, and his father, Elder Lawrence Smith, talk about medicinal plants found in the Brokenhead Ecological Reserve and the importance of this land to the people of Brokenhead. Bring friends and family -- we are planning a great night with presentations, displays, door prizes and refreshments. We will also have our book, Orchids of Manitoba and our popular orchid pins for sale.

Date: Friday, October 27
Time: 7:30 p.m.
Place: Dakota Lawn Bowling Club
1212 Dakota Street, Winnipeg

For more Information call Peggy, 261-9179 (evenings or leave message)

Plant of the Month

Goldthread (*Coptis trifolia*)

By Doris Ames

This low-growing medicinal herb grows in shady moist coniferous forests and bogs and is often overlooked.

The genus name “coptis” comes from the Greek word ‘kopoto’ which means “to cut” in reference to the dissected leaves; “trifolia” comes from the Latin words ‘tri’ meaning “three” and ‘foliatus’ “having leaves”, hence “having three leaves”. The common name Goldthread refers to the distinctive golden-yellow roots that creep just beneath the surface of the soil.

The three leaves, all at the stem base, are evergreen, shiny and divided into three leaflets. Each leaflet is slightly lobed and sharply toothed. The flowering stem is 5-15cm tall and bears a single star-like flower. Blooming time is late May in Manitoba. The intricate flower has 5 white petal-like sepals, 5 small, club-shaped orange petals with nectar at their tips and 4-7 prominent stalked pistils. The flowers are followed by delicate long-stalked pods each with a prominent beak and containing shiny, black seeds. Syrphid flies are attracted to the flowers but pollination biology is not understood.

Goldthread is usually found in cool, moist, acidic (pH 4.0-5.0) soils. It prefers shade and does not tolerate temperatures over 80°F. This year Goldthread plants were harder than usual to find because of the hot, dry summer. The low-growing plant is quickly overgrown by surrounding plants, which makes it hard to find, and its seedpods even harder to find. The leaves bear a superficial resemblance to wild strawberries or three-toothed cinquefoil and one has to look carefully to identify Goldthread. Companion plants are coniferous trees, Labrador tea, bunchberry, wild strawberry, false Solomon seal, and bishop’s cap, moccasin-flower and bluebead lily.

Goldthread has medicinal properties that were familiar to early pioneers and aboriginal people. A bitter tea made from the roots was used to treat sore throats and mouth sores, hence the old-fashioned name canker root. It has also been used for stomach upsets and for the treatment of alcoholism and is known to have antibiotic, anti-inflammatory and sedative properties. It was listed in the U.S. Pharmacopoeia in the 19th century but is seldom used by modern herbalists.

The plant spreads by root propagation as well as from seed but it is very sensitive to clear-cut logging and forest fires. This is likely because it needs to have shade and because its roots grow close to the soil surface and thus easily damaged by fire. Clear-cutting may also disturb its endomycorrhizal associations with the soil and other plants. Look carefully for the shiny, evergreen leaves in the damp woods and mark the spot so that you can return and see the pretty flowers in May.

My visit to an Ancient Museum

By Doris Ames

One definition of a museum is a place where works of art, scientific specimens or other objects of permanent value are kept and displayed. The word "Museum" is derived from the Latin Muses, "a source of inspiration to people". Caves were mankind's first museums but I never really thought much about this until this May when four of us from NOCI drove up to Grand Rapids to look for wild orchids. The weather was cool, 16°C. and spitting rain. I expected we would spend all our time doing surveys of a half dozen known sites and two or three new ones, with the usual plant inventories, miles of walking and driving and the occasional new find. But this all changed when we met the "cavemen".

In the early spring I had been contacted by Dale Brown, a member of the Speleological Society of Manitoba, who told me he had seen some strange orchids around the sinkholes and fens in the Interlake area. He said he was going up to Grand Rapids sometime in late May and he could show them to me. I made arrangements to phone him and perhaps meet him there. Eventually I found out the cavers were going up there on Friday, May 26th and I made arrangements to meet them at the Pelican's Nest Restaurant just outside Grand Rapids early Saturday morning.

That morning we walked in and sure enough four of them were there. We introduced ourselves and over breakfast Dale told me he would show me some of the plants he had been telling me about but first we had to explore a cave!

I had never been in a cave in my life and I hastily tried to decline. He wouldn't hear of it and firmly pronounced that they would be taking all of us into a nearby cave with the enchanting name of Moosearm Pit.

Soon we found ourselves following Dale north on Highway #6 at a brisk clip. He suddenly pulled off the highway onto a Hydro transmission right-of-way and we pulled up behind him and parked. They told us it would be a one-kilometre walk east through a Jackpine forest to the cave. We set off single file, walking over the broken limestone rock and windfalls for what seemed like more than 2 kilometres, when we came to a clearing in the forest. In the centre was a dark hole in the rock overhung by moss and poplar trees. A damp musty breeze came up from the cave and I suddenly felt uneasy.

Our new found cave buddies were already putting on their helmets and lights and two at a time began to enter the cave. Dale told us to step forward because when two come out another two go in. He handed each of us a helmet with a light and advised us not to take our cameras with us as it is very dirty in the caves and the fine silt clogs up the mechanism. He explained that Moosearm Pit is a sinkhole or solutional cave, that is, one formed when acidic groundwater soaked into cracks in the limestone and dissolved the soft underlying material to form large caverns with thin roofs. He warned us to be careful and watch out for bats. A pair of cavers climbed into the cave with enthusiasm, expertly finding the miniscule footholds and disappeared from view.

Stepping back from the cave, I thought to myself, "Doris you must be crazy! You are old and fat and you have arthritis. You have never explored caves or climbed mountains before and this is no time to start. This time you have gone too far!" I made a last feeble attempt to weasel out of it but Dale just laughed insanely.

I suggested that two younger and skinnier members of our group would go instead but he wouldn't

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have it. Realizing I was going, like it or not, I tightened the strap on my helmet, hitched up my pants and walked to the edge of the sinkhole. I could faintly make out one of the cavers called Hugo standing in a chamber about 15 feet below me. His teeth gleamed white in the darkness as he grinned up at me. I turned around and hanging on to the rope, started to lower myself backward into the cave, searching desperately for the footholds on the slippery wet rock. Tiny bright glittering eyes stared at me from crevices in the rock. Suddenly I lost my footing and slid the last 3 or 4 feet, landing hard on the floor of the first chamber. Hugo motioned me forward and I squeezed past a large rock and moved down into the middle of the chamber, noticing more furry shapes and insects in the crevices. The cave was dark and cold; the low ceiling seemed to press down on me. It was very silent and the only sound was the faint dripping of water. Standing there for a minute to get my breath I suddenly found it a cool and peaceful place. It reminded me of the mossy, shady forests where the rare orchids bloom.

Calmer now, I remembered reading how people through the ages have viewed caves as the entrance to the spirit world. From the rock art in France to the pictographs in Manitoba caves, caves have been the site of mankind's first spiritual and cultural expression and experience. Medicine men and shamans of cultures from Africa to Australia have used caves in vision quests and in initiation ceremonies.

Like the sweat lodge, they have allowed humans to experience a symbolic rebirth as they re-emerge from the dark womb of the cave to the world of light. They have also been used as burial places in the American southwest and in South America. In Mexico, the Mayans threw their sacrificial victims along with gold and turquoise articles in the 'cenotes' or water filled sinkholes near their temples. Caves hold the skeletons of ancient people and their artifacts as well as prehistoric animals. The Dead Sea Scrolls written on rolls of ancient papyri were found in a Middle East cave. In Manitoba caves, they have found the skeletons of prehistoric wolves and bison thousands of years old.

Moving forward cautiously, I saw Hugo motion to a narrow opening at floor level in the rock wall ahead. He asked if I wanted to try to squeeze through and enter the second chamber but I declined. Then he motioned me back to the entrance and signalled me to climb up using the rope hanging down from the opening to assist me. I started to scramble up but I was not strong enough and it required much assistance from Hugo pushing me up and Dale encouraging me from above before I could finally get out. As I grabbed onto the rope and dragged myself up I could feel my pants sliding down a few inches and realized that Hugo was seeing quite a bit more of my underwear than I would have liked on such short acquaintance. :-) Mental note to myself, next time wear a belt!

I was certainly relieved and felt almost reborn as I shakily stood up in the light. I was covered with grey mud and my helmet had fallen off but I had managed somehow. I hitched up my pants and felt proud of myself and grateful to my spelunking friends for the experience. On the walk back I found 3 rare Ram's-head lady's-slippers. Life doesn't get any better than that.



Peggy Bainard Acheson

Doris at mouth of cave



Peggy Bainard Acheson

Iris, Doris, Eugene, Dale Brown, Hugo Copper