

## Mr. Bruce Trail

By Russell & Katharine Ferguson

On a recent evening at the Appletons', with a fire in the background and dinner (courtesy of John and Judy) cooking in the oven, we listened to John's story. It seemed, right from the start, that it was inevitable he should one day meet up with the Bruce Trail.

John was born and brought up in England, in East Yorkshire, a countryside of hills and valleys and moors where hiking was simply part of a boy's life, throughout school and especially through Cubs, Scouts and Rovers. For example, there was a trek known as "Lyke Wake Walk" - forty miles in twenty-four hours, overnight and all. This might have put many a kid off hiking forever, but for John it was a time which set fire to him, body and mind. From those early days he went on to study biology at London University, then to work for two and a half years in product development for a company manufacturing baked goods, met Judy, married. Adventure beckoned, and they decided to move to Canada, one great factor in this decision being our vast outdoors. For John, it was back into the food business, this time the research lab for Canada Packers.

An apartment in Toronto was soon joined by a tent for camping escapes, and finally by a cottage in the Huntsville area. With the discovery of the Bruce Trail Caledon Club in their home vicinity, John and Judy became members of the Bruce Trail Association and trail captains. From this simple decision a great deal more would follow, though for a time Bruce Trail had to be put on simmer while their two children were being brought up.

1992, the year of the Trail's 25th Anniversary, brought everything to the boil again. Hikes were organized in all nine clubs over that spring and summer and John and Judy took part in all nine hikes and met up with the Peninsula Club in action by hiking Halfway Log Dump to Tobermory on the Saturday and the Gunpoint Loop on their own the next day. In the course of this weekend, they also encountered old friends and discovered Moore Street along the cliff top at Lion's Head. The cottage at Huntsville was sold,



a property on Moore Street secured in '93. Until they built their house on this land in '95 they lived, while in the Peninsula, on a sailboat which they had motored overnight across Georgian Bay from Midland as a storm was gathering. (At that point they hadn't a clue how to sail, but they taught themselves and adventured in the months that lay ahead, around the coastline, through the North Channel and beyond, exhibiting all the inclinations and qualities which were to be so valuable in their commitment to the Bruce Trail.)

The late eighties and early nineties had been a time when the Peninsula Club was somewhat dormant, and most of the working help came up from other clubs further south. When "Spruce up the Bruce" was implemented as a measure to ready the Trail for the hiking season the specially recruited bunch of volunteers would be feasted during the weekend.

*In 1998 when John moved into the position of Trail Director for the Peninsula Club he and Judy offered their home and hospitality for the annual SPRUCE UP THE BRUCE barbecue and social. This started with approximately forty stalwart trail members and became a uniting force for the Peninsula Club. By the end of his tenure as Trail Director, the SPRUCE UP THE BRUCE occasion brought over ninety eager and willing trail workers to a festive, social occasion with John and Judy and then off to prepare the trails for another year of hiking.*

In 1995 John became a Member at Large on the Executive of the Peninsula Club, then went on to a new position as first Land Stewardship Director, and thence to Vice President. But he felt sure that the eventual position of President was not for him, and in 1998 he became Trail Director. This job had two objectives: to develop re-routes and new trails, and to maintain existing trails. He found the job much bigger than he had imagined, and was very grateful for the help of two seasoned mentors, Ross

McLean and the late Chris Walker. Even then he felt it took him a full year to arrive at a sense of really being Trail Director.

John himself developed much flexibility in his own commitments to the job. He was out on some project most days-- and twenty-one days in one spring month involved the chainsaw!

But he notes now with special satisfaction that although in the earlier days the club was pretty

much controlled by folks from elsewhere, and it was a struggle, it later became much more locally based. When he and Judy joined the Peninsula Bruce Trail Club all those years ago it had about 250 members: now membership has risen to over 600, and a large proportion of the executive live locally. Although John is no longer Trail Director, he is still a very active participant in the club, and his influence continues in many directions.