

Cross Pollination



Road Signs in the Forest: Ancient GPS !

By Donna Fraser

As you casually walk through an old growth forest, you may come across a very mysterious bent tree. It will have a distinctive elbow shaped bend where the trunk grows up a short way then across horizontally and then up again. This is not an illusion or strange disease – you may be in the presence of an ancient Native American Trail Marker Tree. These are ancient signs to help people find their way to camp, water, and food.

We are fortunate to have a group of 4 in southern **Oakville** south of the QEW between Bronte and McPherson Rd indicating a crossing for Bronte Creek. In addition to these, botanist Paul O'Hara also located a bent sugar maple near the Beverly Swamp in **Flamborough**. Dennis Downes, a researcher, confirms these specific trees are marker trees that are around 200 years old. Others in the southern Great Lakes region could be 300 + years old. These marker trees were more prevalent in the Great Lakes region than anywhere else in North America.

When this Master Gardener spoke with Dennis Downes, he told of how

these trees were shaped and grown to be specific landmarks, which were extremely important features in navi-

Canada. Native Americans would travel long distances and at all times of the year. Markers would



Sugar maple markers, Burlington, Ontario. Photo © P. O'Hara, 2012

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Newsletter of the Halton
Master Gardeners

Website:

<http://haltonmastergardeners.wordpress.com>

gating the forests and rugged terrain prior to colonization of USA and

be essential to avoid becoming lost in the snow, as most paths would be covered at that time.

September TO DO List

- Divide bearded iris and peony
- Plant trees and shrubs
- Bring in houseplants if you put them out for summer. Mist to keep up humidity
- Aerate lawn and over seed
- Pull annuals as they fade and place in compost piles
- Prune maples
- Water evergreens and broad-leaf evergreens in preparation for winter

Master Gardeners of Halton

Email Help Line: haltonmastergardeners@gmail.com



Halton Master Gardeners Speakers List

Join us for our monthly speakers held at the Royal Botanical Gardens at 7:15 p.m., first Wednesday of the month.

Contact: Patty King at a_p@cogeco.ca Please note a \$5.00 fee covers speakers and refreshments.

Advice Clinic

Road Signs in the Forest: Ancient GPS ! Cont'd

Trail marker trees were critical to locate various routes, point to camps, indicate water sources, access points across rivers, important food sources, medicinal plants, minerals and to warn of rough terrain.

Hardwood trees were used due to their strength and longevity. The native peoples would modify a young sapling by tying it to the ground using a piece of rawhide or grapevine. Vertical branches would emerge along the sapling's spine and continue to grow upwards. The aboriginals would remove some branches and allow others to grow, creating a distinctive shape usually pointing towards a destination.



Dave Waddell (left) and Dennis Downes (right) with Kingsville marker

It is incredibly beautiful to see something so simple and practical still standing. A living mysterious road sign pointing to a safe route home, shaped by hands no longer here. No electronics, just trees with a specific meaning. Only native tribes were allowed to know what each tree meant.

Another recent dramatic find in Ontario is in Kingsville – go to <http://blogs.windsorstar.com/news/expert-confirms-authenticity-of-kingsville-golf-clubs-300-year-old-trail-marker-tree-with-video> to see the article and video.

Dennis Downes is an avid researcher, writer and photographer documenting his findings for the past 30 years. He is founder and

president of the Great Lakes Trail Marker Tree Society.

<http://www.greatlakestrailtreesociety.org/>