

# BIG GULLY CREEK SANCTUARY —

## A memorial to those who worked to protect it.

There are several unique features near where Big Gully Creek empties into the North Saskatchewan River that make this area one that has drawn local lovers of nature from "pioneer" days (perhaps even before then) to the present. The Pikes who emigrated from England were among those who brought their families to the area on special outings. In the early fifties local people tried to have the area protected without success. Gatherings of several different kinds have taken place there as well as Boy Scout and Girl Guide outings and individual visits.

Besides the junction of the creek and river which attracts many as a fishing spot the area is one of exceptional beauty where parkland and forest meet. In an area of sandhills and scrub poplars (Trembling Aspen) the creek and river support White Spruce and birch, and alder and Highbush Cranberry along their banks. One loop of the creek, locally known as The Horseshoe, has spruce, cactus and creeping juniper on its steep south-facing bank and springs near the base of the east-facing slope. In the moss of these springs grow plants unusual in the area, including Common Butterwort, Blue Columbine, Sparrow's-egg Ladies' Slippers and bog orchids. The Swamps are outliers of the north. Tamarack and Glandular Birch are not found elsewhere in the area. There is much of interest to both plant and bird lovers as Pileated and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Turkey Vultures and Great-crested Flycatcher occur there. Pine Island which lies in the river opposite the mouth of the creek was the site of five fur-trading posts and is protected as an archaeological site.

Changes have occurred in the last decade. The quarter containing the Horseshoe is no longer Crown owned. The new owner unfortunately has destroyed much of the aspen that covered it in favor of cropping what was formerly mostly pasture. Naturally, free access for those who love the area is now questioned. In 1970, when the quarter on which the mouth of Big Gully Creek is situated was being considered as an I.B.P. (International Biological Program) area, the lessee, without permission of the municipal council, brushed trails on some of the creek bank and used a breaking plow on some of the grassland. This damage is slowly but surely repairing itself. The swamp nearest the mouth remains under the protection of a descendant of Frank Foster who homesteaded the area in 1902 and whose grave is on the land. He loved the area and tried to protect it in his lifetime.

While the destruction can never be completely erased it served to spur the interested local residents to fight to save the land as a natural area. Since May 1971 the 600 acres at the mouth of the creek has been leased by the Saskatchewan Natural History Society, with local people donating much of the funds to pay the rent.<sup>1</sup> Winifred and Christine Pike carried the burden of making sure that the funds were adequate each year. In addition many of the local residents spent time each year checking the area, cleaning up after vandals and the careless, and trying to enforce the no hunting signs. Two of the stoutest supporters are no longer with us. Margaret Hickson (nee Pike) spent time picking up smashed beer bottles when she



could have been enjoying the area. Oz-zie Beamish flew his plane over every so often to check on the area. Vandalism, which reached its peak during the oil boom, has now virtually vanished.

On 25 March 1983 a very well attended ratepayers' meeting of the R.M. of Paynton voted to sell the land to the Wildlife Development Fund, to be protected as a sanctuary. Those present were thrilled with a twelve minute audio-visual presentation put together by local photographers, including Vernon Schrank, Velma Foster, Hans de Vogel, and Jim Metherell, working with Christine Pike and David Goodwillie. Donations of the S.N.H.S. and in-

dividuals to the Wildlife Development Fund will help to cover the cost of the land purchase.

This is an historic event and the present council of the R.M. of Paynton is to be highly commended for their sincerity, foresight and co-operation. It is to be hoped that arrangements can be worked out so that the Rural Municipality and the Society hold caveats to the title, whereby insuring that local people have input to the protection of this beautiful part of Saskatchewan.

<sup>1</sup> PIKE, CHRISTINE. 1972. A conservation project on Big Gully Creek. *Blue Jay* 30(1): 6-7.

— S. M. Lamont



*Common Butterwort.*

*Wayne Lynch*