

A plea for the forest

Let the songs of the Beaver Pond trees continue to be heard by our future generations

By Albert Dumont, Citizen Special August 14, 2010 [Comments \(6\)](#)



Photograph by: Ashley Fraser, The Ottawa Citizen

Go to the forest to heal and remind yourself that the heart which beats in your bosom is something made of flesh and not something of wires and lights in a plastic casing.

According to a plan drawn up by developers, the elder trees of Kanata's "Beaver Pond" forest will soon be removed from the Earth's surface. Once this work is complete, explosives will be brought in to deal with the rocky mother landscape from which the trees grew. A crusher will arrive and great pieces of rock half the size of your car will be squeezed until they disintegrate and are rendered down by its might into pieces the size of your fist. These chunks of stone will become a base bed, on which pavement will finally rest and cars will run past generic homes.

Why must this happen? Where does one go to plead for the life of a forest? I had the spiritually enriching experience recently to walk the narrow trails of the doomed forest, occasionally emerging from the wooded pathways into clearings of char-coloured rocks scratched and dimpled by water and time. Seldom-seen grasses spring from cracks in these massive stone slabs. Pin cherries and wild strawberry plants surround them. I did not see any human hug a tree as I walked along; there was no need, the trees there hug each other.

On the main trail I found a tree which had somehow, somewhere in the past, grabbed a 20-pound stone with its stem and is in the process of lifting it away from the ground. If left alone, the growing tree will raise the rock high. They are one now, until death do them part.

Most of the trees around Beaver Pond are leaf bearers and the forest floor is carpeted with what they have shed. Leaves from seasons past lay silent and still that day but last autumn the dry and brittle leaves were pushed swiftly by the winds down the gullies and ravines of the forest, flowing like the rapids of a winding river in the spring. Leaves are wonderful conversationalists. The maple speaks her own language, the birch his, and the elm, and so on through the forest. The wind moves them and they sing their songs. A trained ear can easily notice the difference. The leaves speak a language understood very well by the birds and animals of Beaver Pond.

During my hike through the Beaver Pond forest I picked up a handful of soft soil from where an old tree had once stood. It lay decaying nearby. I brought the soil to my face and knew finally the smell of "time." Concrete and asphalt do not provide this smell.

Time does not "catch up" to a tree the way it does to a human being, time only makes the tree stronger in medicine. Go to an old growth forest if you have had the misfortune to be stricken with depression caused by sickness or heartache. Take your children there to impress upon them that there is something alive that is far greater than technology. Go to the forest to heal and to remind yourself that the heart which beats in your bosom is something made of flesh and not something of wires and lights in a plastic casing.

The Beaver Pond area is a special, sacred place, as are all forests. It is an honoured feature of the only land mass in this area of Ontario never submerged by the waters of the Champlain Sea, which rose with the great thaw of the last ice age more than 10,000 years ago. For that reason alone this forest should be left untouched. But there are as many reasons to leave it be as there are leaves on the trees.

Where does one go to plead for the life of a forest? I ask the poets to come forward, the civil servants and the construction workers and the peacekeepers, the faith leaders and Indian Chiefs and anyone else who reads this who is willing to stand in support of saving the forest.

Let the songs of the Beaver Pond trees continue to be heard by our future generations. Our children will honour us for our wisdom and foresight while our remains lie in our graves, becoming again part of the soil, perhaps even part of the forest.

*Albert Dumont was born and raised in traditional Algonquin territory. He is the author of the poetry and short story collection *Of Trees and Their Wisdom*.*