

A Social History of the Land We Restore

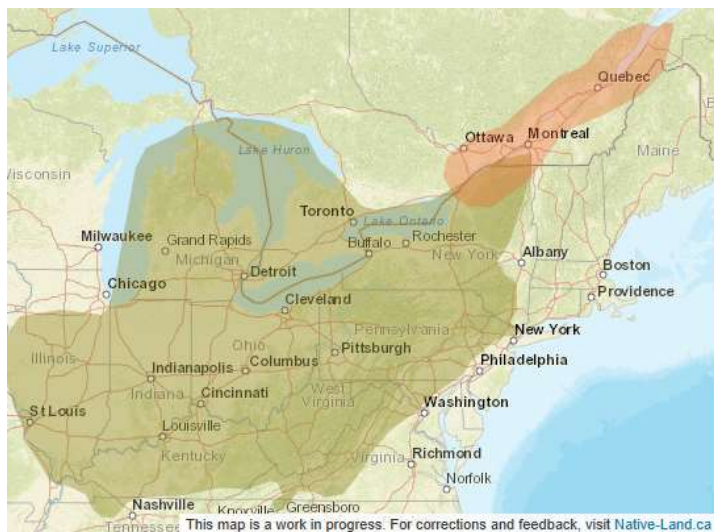
Draft article by Marshall Buchanan, towards the production of Public Education and Interpretative Trail Notes

Paele Indians (as named by archaeologists) are considered the first people to have lived on lands now called the City of Markham, about 9,000 BC. Among the creatures they would have hunted include the mammoths that lived in this sub-arctic landscape which followed the retreating glaciers of the Laurentide Ice Sheet during the end of the last Ice age.

Eight thousand years ago, during the Archaic Period, inhabitants of these lands were using copper tools from copper mined as far north as Lake Superior.

Evidence of a woodland culture begins about 3,000 years ago. Burial mounds, pottery, bows and arrows and stone pipes signify this period.

About 1,000 years ago, the Markham area was occupied by the Haudenosaunee (people of the longhouse). Below is a map from The Canadian Encyclopedia, showing the range of their traditional territory.



Agriculture, longhouses and villages were components of human life in the Markham and Pickering areas 800 years ago. Land was cleared using fire and was fertile enough to support settlements for about 10 years. Corn, beans, squash and sunflowers were grown in the rich soils of the Don and Rouge Rivers Valleys. Conflict between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and neighbouring first nations lead to the abandonment of territories in southern and eastern Ontario. The Algonkian speaking Mississaugas people moved into this territory in the 1600's and were recognized by the first Europeans as the owners of this land. In fact, in the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation have compiled evidence of their ownership and occupation of Rouge River Valley Lands in their Statement of Claim to the Federal Government of Canada, dated March 31st, 2015. Direct quotes from the Statement of Claim are provided in italics below:

In the late 1600s the Mississaugas moved into what is now eastern and southern Ontario. They established villages along the north shore of Lake Ontario and adjacent waterways, some of which were formerly occupied by elements of the Iroquois Confederacy.

..... At all times from the conquest of the French in 1760, from the first Treaty with the Mississaugas in 1764 at Niagara, through to the land surrenders of the 19th century, the British Crown recognized the Mississaugas as the Indians with title to what is now most of southern Ontario. The Mississauga Indians were in possession of those lands by conquest of the Iroquois who had previously taken possession of the lands from the Huron and related groups.....

The Mississauga Indians had many village sites along the north shore of Lake Ontario, including one at the mouth of the Rouge River: Helen Tanner notes that in the late 1600s the Mississaugas moved into what is now eastern and southern Ontario. They established villages along the north shore of Lake Ontario and adjacent waterways, some of which were formerly occupied by elements of the Iroquois Confederacy.²⁰ Tanner also identifies these Mississauga village sites as Ganneous and Quinte on the Bay of Quinte, Quintio at Rice Lake, Ganaraska on Rouge River Valley Tract Claim 9 Mississaugas of the New Credit Report 4, pages 10-11.7 Report 1, page 26.8 Report 1, pages 26-27.9 Report 1, page 27.10 Lake Ontario close to present-day Port Hope, and Teiaiagon and Ganestiquiaigon (on the Rouge River) on Lake Ontario in the present-day Toronto area. There were an additional number of Mississauga villages established on the west end of the lake.

The Rouge River Valley was of great importance to the Mississauga Indians as it was one of two routes from Lake Ontario to Lake Huron via Lake Simcoe (the other being the route up the Humber River known as the “Toronto Carrying Place”

In May, 1794, William Berczy negotiated with the Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada to purchase 64,000 acres in Markham Township (named after Simcoe’s friend, William Markham, the Archbishop of York, England). United Empire Loyalists more Germans from Pennsylvania and after the 1830’s, more Irish, Scottish and English migrants settled in Markham. Homesteading and farming dominated pioneering life. Water powered sawmills, grist mills and woollen mills important industries. By 1857, most of Markham had been cleared of merchantable timber and most of the land was being farmed.

The land immediately north and south of Hwy 7, between Kennedy and McCowan Roads was owned by the Eckardt families as shown by this image of a Markham Township Map from 1880.



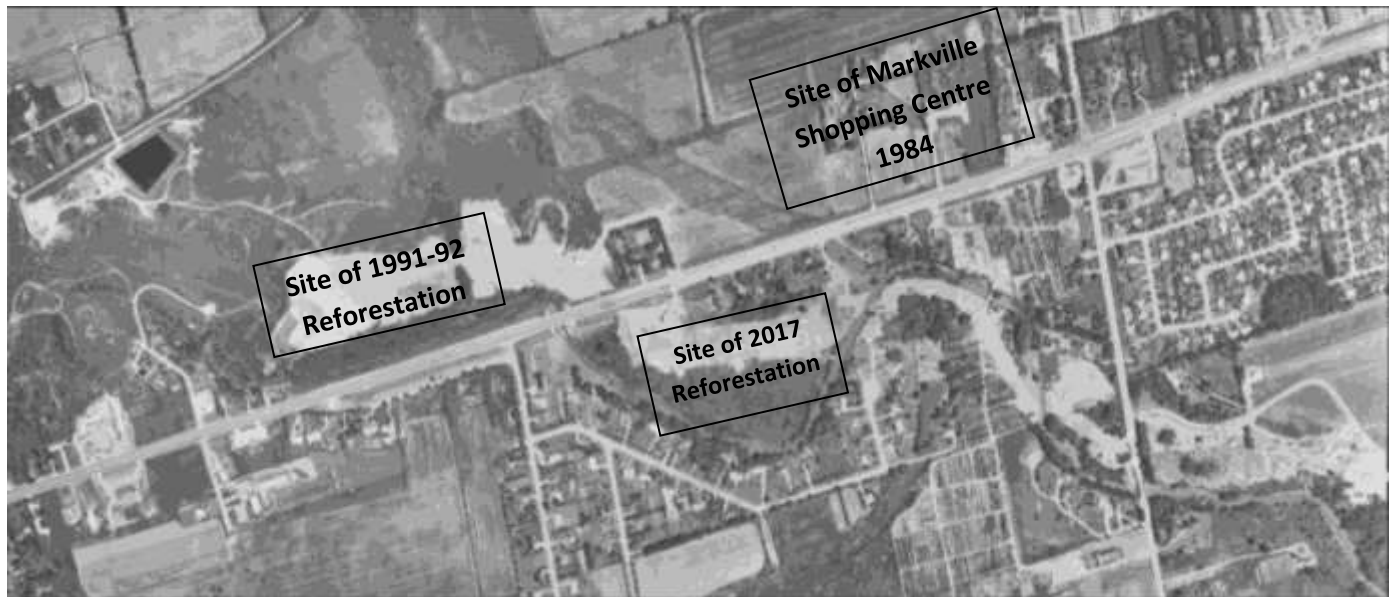
Above: Arrow points to “2018 Biodiversity Enhancement” to the 2017 Reforestation effort.

In 1954, forest cover was still very modest. In fact, tree density was perhaps greater in the urban core than it was in the rural areas.



A few months after this photo was taken, Hurricane Hazel moved over the Greater Toronto Area on October 15th and 16th. The storm dropped 21 cm of rain over 12 hours and caused 81 deaths. The landscape had been cleared, farmed and settled without any regard to manage this volume of water. As a result, the Province's Conservation Authorities Act was amended to allow Conservation Authorities to expropriate land needed for conservation. Over 7,000 acres were identified with a purchase cost of \$11.6 million in 1960. Another \$22.5 million was earmarked to build dams, channels and reservoirs to control floods. In October 1968, the Milne Dam on the Rouge River was completed, leading to the creation of the Milne Conservation Area. From 2014 – 2016, 10,000 Trees for the Rouge organized public tree plantings on this site.

By 1978, suburban housing was spreading across the former farmland and the site of the present day 10,000 Trees forest restoration was in fact a construction site (see photo below). A sewer pipe Right-of-Way was installed deep under the floodplain of the Rouge River and loads of subsoil were deposited on top, raising the level of land several feet.



Above: A 1978 airphoto showing a swath of disturbed soil created during the construction of the underground sewer Right-of Way. The locations of 10,000 Trees restoration projects and the Markville Shopping Centre are also shown.



The soil pit pictures above show a dark horizon in the middle (left photo) and near the bottom (right photo) of the soil profiles respectively. This dark horizon is the “top soil” of the original meadow, which has been buried by clay sub-soil from the construction project to install the sewer pipe. The ground level was raised by around 50 -80 cm on the floodplain. The grey coloured “fill” is more compacted than natural soil and has very poor fertility.

The Austin Drive site was actually planted in 1991 and 1992. Its proposal caused a small but significant controversy at the time. In those days it was still possible to destroy woodlots to create sub-divisions. But people could see that natural areas were disappearing from the communities where they lived. The concept that wild woodlands belonged in urban landscapes clashed with the conventional vision of open space and neatly mowed grass. There were some choice newspaper articles poking fun at local Councillors who felt that naturalization was inappropriate for urban parkland.

Also, landscape restoration was rare and was really only practiced by Conservation Authorities. The idea that power would be shared with volunteers to build green infrastructure was threatening to local governments. However, this was the beginning of the big recession in the early 1990's. Leading thinkers were telling local governments that they could reduce their costs significantly, if they agreed to share the management of public greenspaces with local citizens. The City of Toronto decided that long grass in some City Parks was good for the environment and for budgets. At the same time, baby boomers were now at the age where their children were older, so they could find new purpose as community leaders. Neighbourhood groups organized themselves to tackle environmental issues such as recycling, school ground naturalizations, tree plantings and street tree surveys. A hallmark of this movement towards forest restoration and particularly urban forests, was the publication of the book The Simple Act of Planting a Tree: A Citizen Forester's Guide to Healing Your Neighborhood, Your City, and Your World, in 1990. Prior to this was the landmark call for sustainable development by Gro Harlem Brundtland in her 1987 Report to the United Nations entitled Our Common Future. The report called for a cultural shift away from resource exploitation, towards balance and global cooperation. So with global recognition that the status quo was leading us in the wrong direction, a recession and a generation of passionate volunteers, a whole movement of community and social forestry was born.

Discussions about which species to plant at the Austin Drive site tried to balance opinions from landscape architects with opinions from foresters. In 1992, we had help from the Canadian Armed Forces to put a temporary bridge across the river to get to the southwest part of the site.