

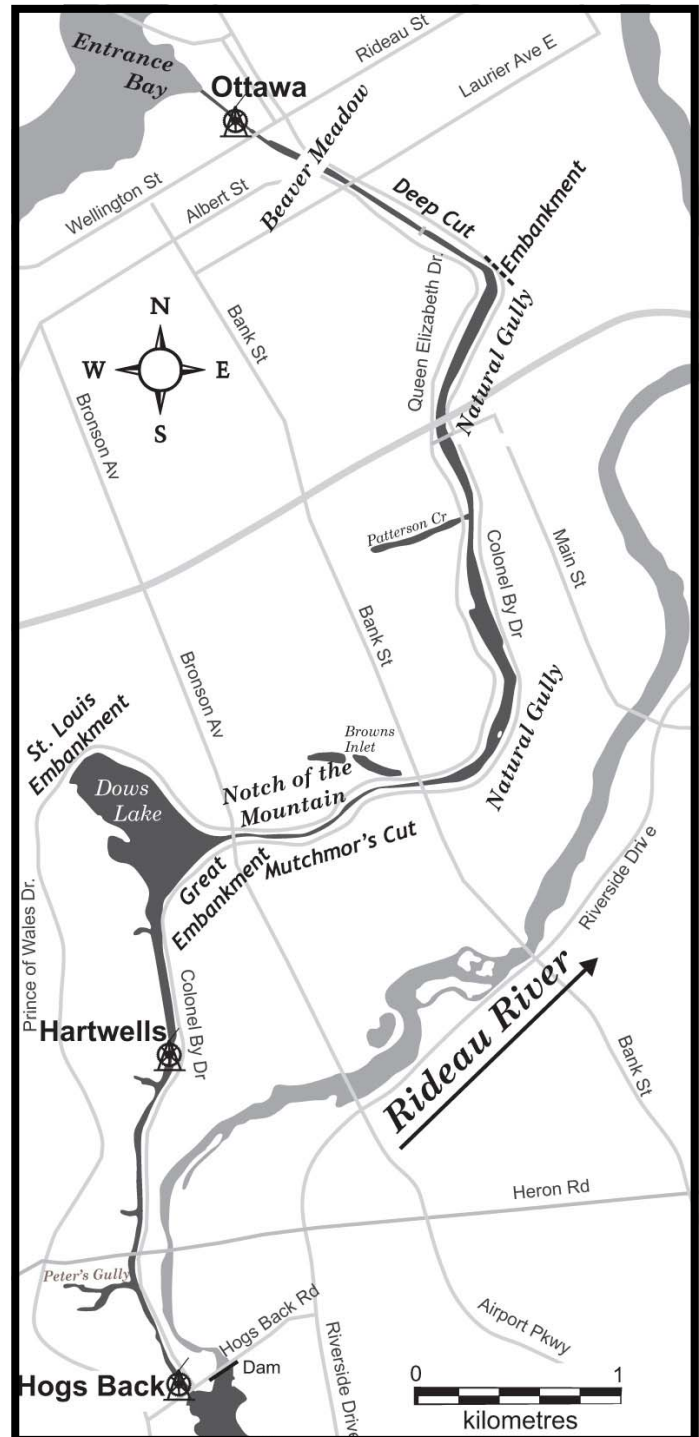
## *The Rideau Canal in Ottawa*

The 8 km section of the canal from the Ottawa Locks to Hogs Back is usually referred to as being a completely excavated channel, but that's not true. Colonel By used the slackwater system in Ottawa, taking advantage of existing topography to avoid excavation, just as he did for the rest of the Rideau Canal.

Once Entrance Bay had been established as the starting point for the canal, the challenge was to connect the canal to the Rideau River. Just beyond the bedrock top of Entrance Valley was a spot known as the Beaver Meadow, which is exactly as the name describes, a meadow area created by beavers damming a stream (beavers were creating slackwater long before Colonel By used this technique for canal construction). This natural feature was taken advantage of to become a canal basin. *"The Swamp, generally called the Beaver Meadow, at the head of the Entrance Valley, afforded much facility for forming the proposed works, and was selected as a proper site for a Basin, or Reservoir, at the head of the projected Eight Locks"* (Thomas Burrowes, 1826). The basin, now filled in, was in the area of present-day Confederation Park, the Mackenzie King Bridge and the Ottawa Convention Center.

Colonel By's first plan was to run an excavated cut from the Beaver Meadow straight to the Notch of the Mountain (near Dows Lake) and then follow the present day route of the canal but come into the Rideau River below (downstream) of Hogs Back (see map on page 2). When the area was surveyed, and Colonel By had solidified his plans for a full slackwater system, he changed the route to take advantage of what nature provided, a 3 km long gully, an area already excavated by nature, the Natural Gully.

From the Beaver Meadow, he had the Deep Cut excavated until it intersected the Natural Gully. The exit of the gully was blocked off with an embankment and the gully was followed south to its end, a low point in a ridge crossing the route of the canal known as the Notch of the Mountain. The gully required little work other than grubbing it out. To quote part of Colonel By's 1831 progress report: *"From the Beaver Meadow to the Natural Gully a distance of 1053 yards, the Excavation was through clay and from its great depth is termed the Deep Cut; at the North Entrance of Natural Gully, a Mound of Earth or Dam of 15 feet in height and 315 feet in length was to be constructed to prevent the water escaping down a Ravine; the Gully in question is 3300 yards in length, an average*



Friends of the Rideau is a volunteer, non-profit organization, working to enhance and conserve the heritage and charm of the Rideau Canal.

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This newsletter is published by Friends of the Rideau with assistance from the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport.

breadth 83 yards, from its south [north] entrance to the Notch of the Mountain."

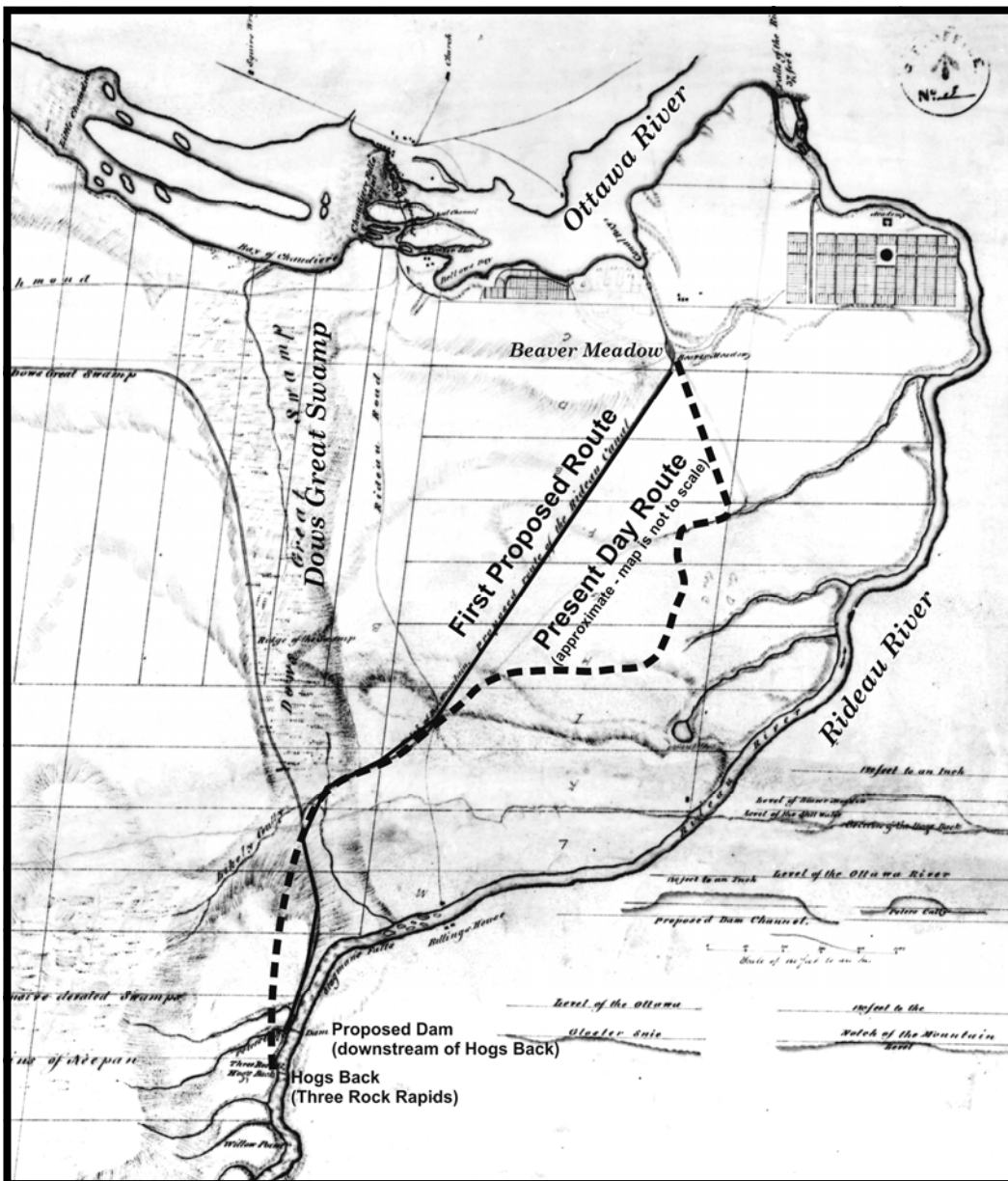
An excavation through the Notch of the Mountain, known as Mutchmor's Cut (named for a settler living in that area), brought the canal to Dow's Great Swamp. Colonel By planned a mounded aqueduct (a canal channel sitting on a large mound of earth) to cross the swamp, but again, nature provided a less expensive solution. A few hundred metres down the swamp was a narrowing, the "Ridge of the Swamp", an area that could easily be dammed. Work had already started on the mounded aqueduct which was now converted into being simply an embankment (the Great Embankment). Together with the St. Louis Embankment at the Ridge of the Swamp, they created a lake as part of the canal

route. As one of the Royal Engineers, Lt. Frome, succinctly put it: "*Dow's Great Swamp, which, by means of two massive earthen embankments, is converted into a pool 20 feet deep.*"

Nature did not help Colonel By for the rest of the route except for the fact that he didn't have to excavate any bedrock (since none was found between the Ottawa Locks and Hogs Back). But he did take advantage of topography by taking two of the three planned lift locks for Hogs Back and moving them to Hartwells which saved quite a bit of excavation.

In the end, almost half (3 km of the Natural Gully and 0.5 km at Dow's Lake) of the canal in this area is flooded topography, not an excavated ditch.

- Ken Watson



In this c.1827 map we see the first proposed route for the canal in Ottawa. From the Beaver Meadow it made a beeline to the Notch of the Mountain and then followed close to the present-day route but came out downstream of Hogs Back (as opposed to the present day location of the canal which comes out at the head of (above) the rapids at Hogs Back).

Another version of this map has the notation "The canal ... and the dam at the Hog's back (50 ft high) is another method proposed by Lt. Col. By of ascending to the still water at Capt. Wilson's." Captain Wilson was an early settler located on the east side of the Rideau River, about halfway between Mooneys Bay and Hunt Club Road.

"Sketch of the Route of the Rideau Canal from Grand Entrance Bay to the foot of the Black Rapids", National Archives of Canada, NMC 21762, not dated.



## 2014 AGM

Friends of the Rideau's AGM took place on May 10 in the theatre of the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre in Smiths Falls. Our Chair, Hunter McGill, welcomed everyone including Steve Blake, the newly appointed Associate Director of Ontario Waterways.

Hunter reviewed the year for Friends, noting that we had 5000 visitors at the Depot in Merrickville in 2013 and that our partnership with Ted Hitsman for canoe and kayak rentals at the Depot was working very well.

Hunter noted that Parks Canada had formed a new business unit for their waterways. He also mentioned that a concern of Friends is that the heritage part of the Rideau should be recognized and valued. He announced that Friends had written a letter to Minister Aglukkaq outlining our concerns (you will find it on our website).

The minutes of the 2013 meeting and the 2013 financial report were reviewed and approved.

Elections were held for directors, with Ed Bebee, Hunter McGill, Ken Watson, Gillian Organ and Victor Suthren being elected for a 2 year term. They join existing directors Cheryl Gulseth, Brian Osborne and Jo MacFadden.

The featured talk was by Dr. Marcus Letourneau titled "What next: Reflections on the Rideau Corridor Landscape Strategy." Dr. Letourneau is a professional planner with an emphasis on heritage and an adjunct professor at Queens University.

Marcus began his talk with a quick review of the evolution of the understanding of cultural heritage, a term of relatively recent origins. He noted that in the discussions of a value-based approach to heritage protection and conservation, value had a greater meaning than simply financial. In this context, Dr Letourneau commented on the problem of growing political pressure to move to cost recovery for the operation of heritage sites.

With regard to landscape preferences, Dr. Letourneau cited the challenge of separating "pretty" from "interesting" from "important" when considering key values and features of heritage landscapes. There is a need to use language that has meaning for the public.

With specific reference to the Rideau Waterway Landscape Study, factors which made the exercise necessary but challenging included overlapping and conflicting jurisdictions, pressures on authorities at the municipal level to allow development to generate revenue and the above-mentioned political interest in cost-recovery for heritage. He noted that much remains to be done and that planners and decision-makers need to include community-based organizations in their planning and heritage protection discussions.

## Message from the Chair

Well, it wasn't the summer we hoped for. We had cooler temperatures and a bit too much rain.

For die-hards this didn't keep us from visiting the Rideau and enjoying its charms, but it's clear that the numbers of water-borne and land-based visitors were below "normal" levels. But as the famous American baseball philosopher Yogi Berra once said, "If people don't want to come out to the ball park, nobody's gonna stop them."

Nobody stopped Friends of the Rideau from doing its usual summer road show. We took part in the Westport Heritage Festival in June, the Antique and Classic Boat Show at Rideau Ferry in July and Colonel By Day at the Ottawa Lockstation in August. Before the rain started in Westport and Ottawa we met many friends and made new ones and had the opportunity to talk about Rideau heritage with lots of visitors. What is normally our biggest day of the year in terms of meeting folks, the Merrickville car show in July, can be best described with one word – soggy. Ah well, there's always next year.



**Friends at the Classic Boat Show**

Ed Bebee (left) and Hunter McGill (right) chat with visitors to our booth at the Classic Boat Show at Rideau Ferry this summer. Photo by Ken W. Watson

On this page you'll find a report on our Annual General Meeting in May at the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre in Smiths Falls. I found the talk by Dr. Marcus Letourneau of Queens University very stimulating and challenging in terms of the role he identified for volunteer organisations like Friends of the Rideau in raising the importance of heritage in the context of Canada's historic canals. In this context, I'm sorry to report that we have not heard back from the Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, minister responsible for

*Continued on page 5*

## The Legend of Peter Bray

by  
Ed Bebee

Early days in Eastern Ontario are captured in an unpublished poem by Captain Ned Fleming, who tells the story of Peter Bray as he heard it. The grandson of the first Lockmaster at Chaffey's Lock, Ned was the skipper of the "*Rideau Queen*" as well as a skilled violinist, poet and storyteller.

In the poem, Fleming says that Peter Bray was a British soldier who had been given a grant of excellent land north of Battersea (near Loughborough Lake). Peter had no money to build a house so he went to William Potter to obtain a loan. Potter said that if Peter were to make him his heir, he could have the loan and never have to repay as long as he lived. Peter agreed to these terms, writing Potter into his will.

One day Peter was out working in the woods. Along came young Ruth Potter, William Potter's daughter, who invited Peter to sit and chat. The conversation came to an abrupt end when she started screaming for help, tearing her clothes and pulling her hair. Two men, William Potter and Bill Jones, burst out of the woods, pointing guns at Peter Bray.

Bray was accused of rape - a capital offence. At the trial, Peter was found guilty and condemned to hang in the Kingston Market Square. He made three prophecies on the scaffold: that William Potter would suffer painfully from disease, praying for death, which would come to him by fire; that Ruth Potter would live in torment for condemning an innocent man to death and die by fire, confessing her lie; and that Bill Jones would perish where a child would live.

The hanging was a fiasco - two ropes broke before the third and successful attempt.

The poem relates that Bill Jones drowned face down in a wheel rut, too drunk to roll out. After years of depression and caring for her suffering father, Ruth and her father died in a house fire. Before she died, she confessed her lie to a neighbour who had pulled her out. That her father, wanting the land, paid Jones to swear to the rape, then kept him in drinking money. Ruth saw visions of her mother and Peter Bray welcoming her as she died.

In a 1937 letter, Fleming wrote that he had changed the names in his poem, that Peter Bray was actually Peter Brass; William Potter was Sir Henry Smith, a prominent local lawyer; Bill Jones was Joe Cameron, and Ruth Potter was Ruth Convery. However the facts are somewhat different.

Peter Brass was in fact William Brass, born in Kingston about 1792. He received a grant of land, in 1821, in

Loughborough Township, where he was a merchant and fur trader. Brass fell into financial difficulties and began drinking heavily. His wife left him. In 1835 he hired Sir Henry Smith to help him straighten things out. Smith drew up the patent on the Brass property naming himself as heir.

Joe Cameron was most likely John Caswell, who claimed he saw the rape, but couldn't prevent it.

Ruth Convery was eight-year-old Mary Ann Dempsey, who had been left in Brass' care. His lawyers said he was in a state of delirium tremens at the time — incapable of rape. Two doctors and a nurse testified that it was probable that the child had been raped.

The incident took place in June 1837 and the trial took place on October 7 of that year. Brass hired two lawyers, Henry Cassady and a young (22 year old) John A. Macdonald to defend him. Despite a "very able defence," William Brass was convicted and sentenced to be hanged.

On December 1, 1837, Brass was led out to a temporary scaffold built out from a window in the Kingston courthouse. The rope broke once, not twice. No prophecies were reported.

The British Whig summed it up, stating that Brass had "fallen victim to an infamous conspiracy commenced by a rascally individual in whom he placed confidence, and carried into execution by wretches as worthless as himself."

Maggie Fleming is gratefully acknowledged for providing a copy of Captain Edward Fleming's previously unpublished poem and allowing it to be published. The poem, in its 189 line entirety, and a longer version Ed's article can be found at:

[www.rideau-info.com/canal/articles/](http://www.rideau-info.com/canal/articles/)

## New Book on CD

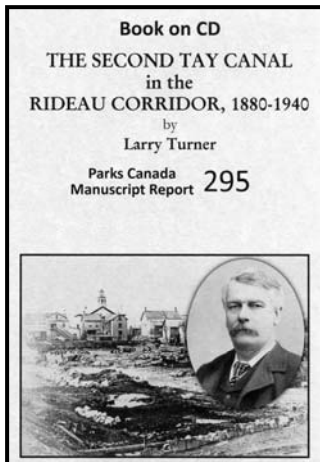
Friends of the Rideau is pleased to announce the completion of another Book on CD, our 12th – this one titled *“The Second Tay Canal in the Rideau Corridor, 1880-1940”* written by Larry Turner. The “Second Tay” is the canal we use today to travel from Lower Rideau Lake to the Town of Perth.

In the latter part of the 1800s, after the failure and abandonment of the first Tay Canal (1834-c.1849), came a lobby to revive the commercial waterway link between Perth and the Rideau Canal. It was championed by Perth MP, John G. Haggart, who succeeded in getting the required government funding to build the channel, two locks, a dam, and a new basin in Perth. The Second Tay Canal was known for a time as Haggart’s Ditch.

Turner’s 331 page report looks at the details of the planning, financing, construction and use of the second Tay Canal. It includes 47 illustrations (maps, diagrams and photos).

For full details about the book, see the manuscript report section of our website at:

[www.rideaufriends.com/mrs/](http://www.rideaufriends.com/mrs/)



**Upper Beveridges Lock**

Built to the same design as an original Rideau Canal lock, the Beveridges locks were in fact constructed over 50 years later.

### Interesting Website

Those interested in our National Parks and National Historic Sites should have a look at the National Parks of Canada Electronic Library. This site, not affiliated in any way with Parks Canada, was started by two Americans. They are trying to make many of Parks Canada’s documents available to the public. It’s a great initiative, one that Parks itself should be doing. Have a look at:

[www.parkscanadahistory.com](http://www.parkscanadahistory.com)

### Letter from the Chair continued ...

Parks Canada, in response to our letter (printed in our Spring newsletter and posted on our website) encouraging her to restore funding to the Rideau Canal budget to ensure proper attention to heritage infrastructure maintenance.

Your Board will continue to raise the profile of the heritage of the Rideau at every opportunity. Through our publications, via our participation at public events along the Waterway, in our dialogue with Parks Canada and in our responses to messages received through our website we emphasize the importance of the heritage of the waterway.

Let us know your concerns, and let us know of your actions in this respect.

I want to close by thanking the Village of Merrickville-Wolford, the Ontario Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport and the federal Ministry of Employment and Social Development (through its Canada Summer Jobs program) for their support. A special thanks to Parks Canada for allowing us to use key facilities. Memberships and donations are significant, but the financial and in-kind contributions of the above partners enable us to reach out and engage with visitors and concerned people like you.

- Hunter McGill

## 2014 Boating Stats

The number of vessel passages in 2014 was down 9% from 2013, marking the 5th straight year of boat traffic decline on the Rideau Canal. Moorings were up slightly, +4.9% when compared to 2013.

The return of 1 additional hour for summer operations in late June of this year (still short of the hours before the dramatic 2013 operational cuts) did not halt the decline in boating traffic on the Rideau. Clearly much more needs to be done by Parks Canada to get boaters using the locks on the Rideau Canal. In 2009 there were almost 76,000 vessel passages compared to less than 52,000 this year, a 32% steady decline in boating traffic in just the last 5 years.





## Sir John Franklin and the Rideau Canal

With the discovery this summer of the *HMS Erebus*, one of the lost ships from the final (1845) arctic expedition led by Sir John Franklin, it is of interest to note Franklin's visit to the Rideau Canal in 1827. The following are some period quotes (taken from "*Construction History of the Rideau Canal*", Manuscript Report 193, Parks Canada, 1976, digital edition, Friends of the Rideau, Smiths Falls, Ontario, 2008).

"I have great pleasure in informing you of the arrival of Capt. Franklin and Dr. Richardson here last evening about six o'clock - they landed at the entrance of the Canal where we all assembled to receive them, and were fortunate enough to prevail on him to accept of our invitation to sleep and spend a day among us ... We have this morning taken them round all the works etc. from the Bridge to Rideau Falls and shown them the Plans of the route to Kingston and explained the Nature of the Works as they are at present projected - with which they seem much pleased and Col. By has availed himself of their presence to request Capt. Franklin to perform the ceremony of laying the first stone of the Locks." (August 16, 1827 letter from Lt. Pooley to the Earl of Dalhousie).

"On the day subsequent to his arrival [August 16, 1827], His Lordship proceeded up the line of the Rideau Canal as far as the Hog's Back, to view the unrivalled progress which had been made in that section of this great work within the short elapse of time since its commencement; and we understand he was pleased to express himself in the highest terms of approbation of its advancement. On Saturday, by previous arrangement, it was decided that His Lordship should lay the foundation stone of the great water lock at the debouchment of the Canal. Every requisite preparation was soon made under the direction of Mr. Thomas McKay, the contractor - and the huge mass of solid stone, weighing nearly two tons, was, at ten minutes past three o'clock p.m., lowered from the sheer poles into its bed, amidst the acclamations of the surrounding multitude whom the novelty and interest of the spectacle had assembled. His Lordship, after examining if it was right, gave it the three mystic blows with the hammer, which concluded the ceremony. Among the accompaniments to this proceeding was the broaching of a puncheon of rum, which was given to the workmen, and which they enjoyed with the usual glee attendant on such an event ... A number of mines had been prepared in the quarries on the surrounding heights, and at the moment the stone was lowering into its bed these were discharged with the utmost precision, so as to imitate a salute from the bark of artillery, but with far greater effect." (LAC, MG24, A12, Vol. 26. - *Chaudiere Kettle*, Oct. 3rd. 1827).



## Bald Eagles on the Rideau Canal

This summer afforded the opportunity for some to view an extremely rare sight on the Rideau Canal, nesting bald eagles. While bald eagles are seen at times on the Rideau, these are the first in many years to actually nest here.

This pair of bald eagles took over an osprey nest located in the top of a pine tree on Sand Lake this spring. They built it into a much larger eagle's nest. One chick was hatched in May, staying in the nest until it was strong enough to fly off in early August.

Mum and dad eagle both foraged on the lake, including at least one instance of chasing an osprey which had caught a sunfish (when last seen the osprey still had the fish grasped firmly in its claws).

Bald eagles are an extirpated species in southern Ontario. Originally quite common, they were driven to local extinction by loss of habitat, hunting, and later, the use of DDT which softened the shells of their eggs. They are now making a very slow comeback in this area.

Colour photos of the eagles, including photos of the osprey chase, can be found on [www.rideau-info.com](http://www.rideau-info.com)



Mum eagle and chick in nest, June 2014

Photo by: Ken W. Watson