

## COLONEL BY'S FIRST RIDEAU TRIP

A few months ago, Friends' member Jack Hanna asked me about a tale of the Rideau related to Lt. Colonel John By's first canoe trip along the Rideau route. The story generally goes that they prepared for a two week trip and that the voyageur paddlers did it in only three days. The story about preparing for a two week trip doesn't ring true, since voyageurs of that era could have done the trip in three days. So, as typical of most anecdotal tales, "facts" got made up along the way. Jack's question about the tale sparked me to research this trip and it turns out that it is very well documented in the survey diary of John Burrows. The trip in fact took four days, which included a number of stops along the way.

It was at 10 am on May 11, 1827 that five canoes started off from Captain Wilson's residence on the Rideau River. Wilson, a retired naval officer, arrived in the area in about 1819 and built himself a log house which he called Ossian Hall. It is green space today, located on the east side of the Rideau River south of Mooneys Bay. In a second survey Burrows did that year, he noted the canoes were portaged to the spot from Entrance Bay [Ottawa Locks] with baggage arriving at Captain Wilson's on carts.

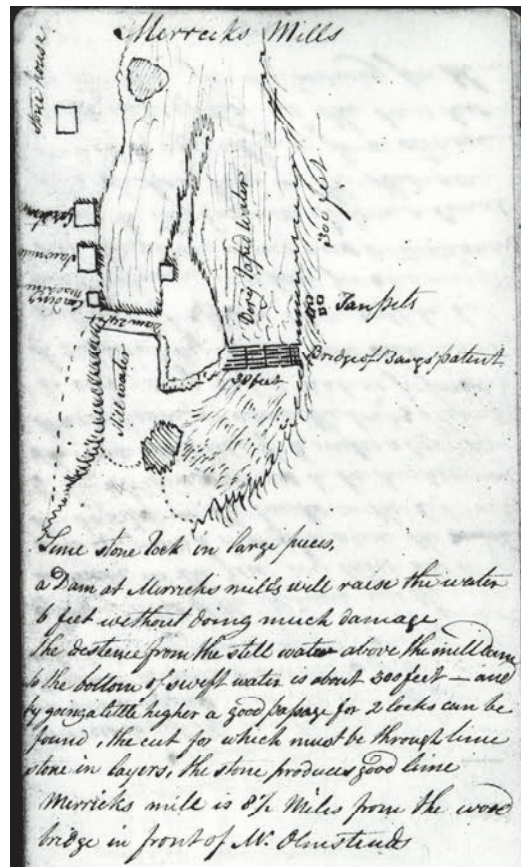
We don't have a listing of who was on that trip, but we do know names from a second survey Burrows was on that year, which started on July 22. On that survey, names of the paddlers included Laundreau, Burnelle, Pudblanc, La Jeunesse, and La Vigne as well as Cassey, MacKarthey and Frazier, showing the general voyageur makeup. That second survey included three Royal Engineers as well as four members of the Royal Engineer's staff as passengers.

It is unclear if Samuel Clowes, who surveyed the Rideau Route in 1823 and 1824, was on the May trip, but they did have Clowes' report and map, which Burrows references several times in his diary. Clowes proposed a conventional canal, with canal cuts and a tow path. Burrows made a number of comments about where Clowes planned to place cuts and locks in contrast to By's plan for a steamboat (slackwater) canal. It does appear that they had surveyor Reuben Sherwood along, he was very familiar with the route, particularly in the Rideau lakes and Catarqui River areas.

We are very fortunate to have a full transcription of Burrows' diary in the wonderful little book "Sights and Surveys, Two Diarists on the Rideau" by Edwin Welch, published by the Historical Society of Ottawa in 1979. Quotes in this article have been taken from that book.

Burrows' diary of the May 11 to 14 survey trip begins with:

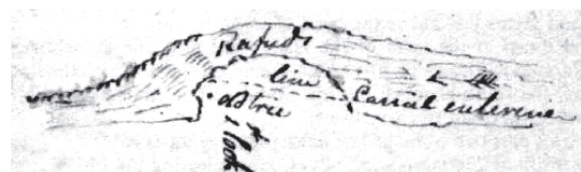
"Started at ten o'clock from Captain Wilson's in five canoes. The appearance of the land is rather level on the left hand for about half a mile, and on the left bank it is about 20 feet, from which place the bank is about equal in height. The width is about 180 feet at the foot of the Black Rapids. The river is about 400 feet



John Burrows' Survey Diary

This page from Burrows' survey diary showing the mills at Merrickville. The original diary is held by the City of Ottawa Archives.

wide and seven feet water at lowest tide. The line of canal enters the river by the side of an old tree."



Voyageurs could paddle quickly over extended distances. Most paddlers today would be very hard pressed to keep up with them. While this trip involved several stops

and multiple rapids to navigate, the first leg was rather quick; they arrived at the foot of Long Island at 11:15 am, a distance of 12 km. That meant an average paddling speed, of fully loaded canoes (supplies and non paddling passengers), of 9.6 kph.

They landed and had lunch at the head of Long Island at 1:30 pm. They came up the east channel, the route followed by the Rideau Canal today. Burrows' noted that one canoe came up the west channel and lost a half hour by having to portage twice. That side had two significant sets of rapids, while the east side only had one, which apparently didn't require a portage.

They resumed their journey at 2:15 pm and arrived at Kemptville Creek at a half hour before sunset, still 13 km short of where they intended to go on that first day. To quote from the diary:

"After ten hours of almost incessant labour the shades of the evening sun seemed to break. 'Tis time to prepare for rest, but eight miles short of the intended stopping place (Captain Burritts), and the forbidding aspect of the land on the banks of the river. Shantying speaks loud to proceed. Rum renewed the men and, singing, pulling and striving for the lead of canoes, on we went and arrived at the house of Mr. Hurd on the Rideau quarter past nine o'clock, where we took tea, and in a sympathising humour courted Morpheus between the blankets."

That made for an 11.5 hour paddling day, the following days would be much longer. They had landed near the foot of Burritt's



**Burritts Rapids (looking south)**

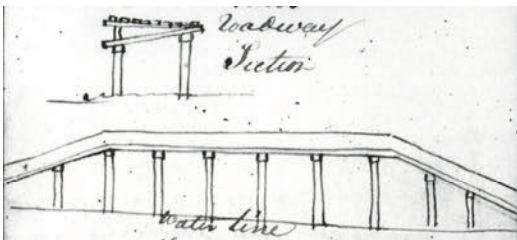
The survey included depth soundings in spots. Here we can see the shallowing of the river at Burritts Rapids. The "Valley" (left), later known as Oxford Snie, was used to create the navigation channel.

acting as a sail, seemed to be the principle part used to propel it forward. It seemed to float over the surface of the water with but little trouble to itself."

They arrived at the mouth of the Tay River at 7:30 am. Burrows noted that they caught two black bass using a line hanging from the canoe. They entered Rideau Lake, then 6 feet lower than it is today:

"The entrance into the lake is indescribably beautiful. Its surface as smooth as a mirror. The banks delightfully dispersed with opening buds of spring reflected on the surface of the river. In front on a projected point a beautiful appearance of a dwelling house. The whole enlivened and softened by the rising sun."

They stopped for breakfast at Oliver's Ferry [Rideau Ferry] and then paddled through Rideau Lake to Upper Narrows [Narrows] arriving there at 12:45 pm. They continued along Rideau Lake:



**Burritt's Bridge**

Burrows' sketch of the fixed bridge at Burritt's Rapids. Burrows writes: "The roadway is made by large six inch planks from beam to beam. It does not appear of any strength for standing any length of time. Indeed I saw a piece of patchwork placed on one of the beams to raise the upper side to a level."

Rapids and at 5 am the next morning they left, with their baggage in two wagons, going around the rapids.

The voyageurs likely lined the empty canoes up the rapids. They arrived at "Mr. McCreas", the homestead of an early settler, Thomas McCrea, located just south of Merrickville. They had breakfast there and then

resumed their journey at 10:30 am. Burrows notes "Maillands Rapids" [Maitland's Rapids, today's Kilmarnock] and "Edmonsons Rapids" [Edmunds]. They portaged the rapids at Smiths Falls and at 7 pm made camp for the night at a spot about 1 km south of the falls.

They were underway at 3:30 am on May 13. Burrows was an astute observer and appears to have been a naturalist at heart. He made an interesting observation about a squirrel sailing across the river:

"There is many circumstances in the conduct and ingenuity of the animal kingdom which at times called forth our astonishment. Here with pleasure we behold the instinct displayed by a little squirrel in sailing across the river, his tail

“Our route turns to the left. The direct line by the right of Little Island leads to the longest extent of the Rideau Lake. Here is several clearings on the banks and, by the curling smoke, dwelling houses. We turn to the left, opposite a small clearing and house, to the Portage.”

Burrows with his reference to the longest extent of the Rideau Lake is describing Upper Rideau Lake extending to Westport, then known as Head of the Lake. They stayed left, following the route the canal takes today, into McNallys Bay and to the long portage over the watershed divide at Newboro. It took them an hour to do the portage. They must have spent some time examining the line of the canal which had been laid out by Samuel Clowes, likely the route followed today (which did not directly follow the portage). They got going again at 5:30 pm and arrived at Chaffey’s Mills: “Half past eight arrived at Mr. Shaffery’s Mill, where we left a part of our baggage and was treated very kindly by Mr. Shaffery.” They left Chaffey’s at 9 pm and arrived after dark at Davis’ Mill where they camped.

On Monday, May 14, they were underway at 4 am, doing the short portage around Davis’ dam and mill, and putting into Sand Lake. Here Burrows provides my favourite quote:

“The view of Davies Lake [Sand Lake] is very pleasing. The many islands, as if floating on a transparent mirror which mellowed and reflected by the tint of the morning, strikes the contemplative mind with a sensation of pleasure not easily forgotten.”

They arrived at the head of the long portage around Jones Falls at 6:30 am. They had a cold breakfast, likely at the foot of the portage (near today’s Hotel Kenney), and then proceeded south, into what was then known as the Drowned Lands. Burrows states:

“Much impeded by the floating logs in the river below the Falls [White Fish River]. The land seemed to be overflowed as far as we could see. It is a very difficult navigation.”

He later notes:

“The first ten miles was over sunken land. Our canoes sailing through the openings of the trees, and, from the innumerable windings and curves, the route is very difficult to find.”

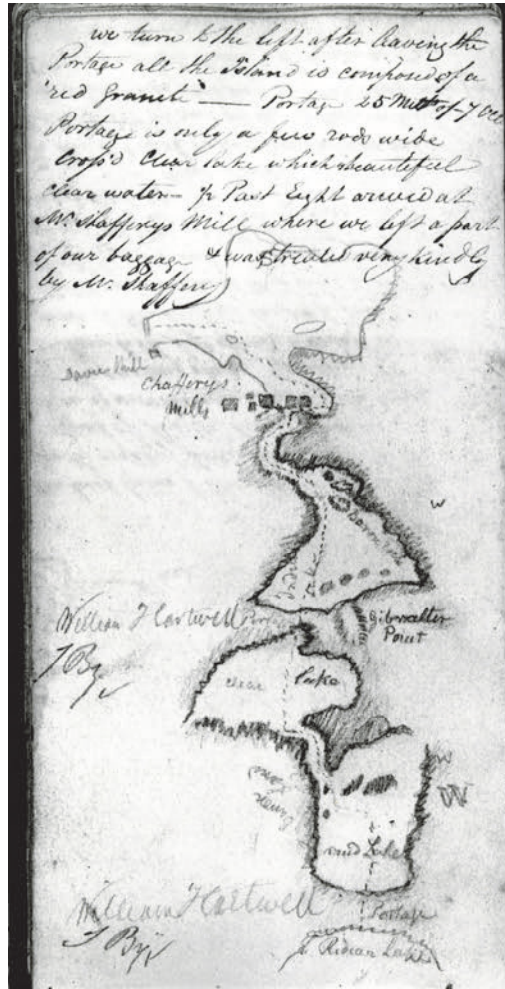
This area was flooded by two mill dams, one at Morton and one at the Round Tail, located just upstream of Upper Brewers. As described by Burrows, it was a flooded forested area. They were entertained at one point by some lumberjacks maintaining their balance on rolling logs:

“In our route over the sunken lands we were much interested for the safety of one of the shanty men

who was collecting together a quantity of saw logs. No slack rope dancer could be more expert in balancing themselves on the rope than these men did on round logs, which were continuously rolling under their feet. At last one of their party fell into the water; the canoes after him. For some time he hung by the canoe, but soon he left his hold and swam away, and seemed to enjoy our fears for his safety.”

They arrived in Kingston at 9 pm—the end of Day 4 of paddling. They didn’t stay long, they left the next day, Tuesday, May 15, 1827, to paddle back to Bytown. One final interesting note in terms of portaging (see the Fall/Winter 2022 newsletter for the portaging story) which was normally done to go around a natural impediment, is that on their return, in the area between Kingston Mills and Lower Brewers, Burrows writes: “Obstructed in our route by a raft of boards and a large Basswood tree laying across the river. Was compelled to unload the canoes and carry across the raft.”

- Ken Watson



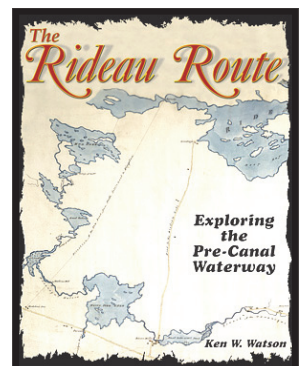
**Burrows’ Survey Diary**  
Newboro to Davis (looking south)

### The Rideau Route

For more information about early surveys of the Rideau Canal, you may enjoy my book “The Rideau Route.”

It is available as a free PDF download from my website at:  
[www.rideau-info.com](http://www.rideau-info.com)

Note, a print version is no longer available, it got too expensive to print—kww.



## Message from the Chair

Dear Friends,

What a strange spring it has been, with temperatures bouncing up and down. Let's hope, now that the Canal has opened, that the weather settles and we have pleasantly warm temperatures to enjoy.



### The Depot—Merrickville

Friends of the Rideau has been running the Depot, our Rideau Interpretation Centre, since 1995. The building, which dates to c.1864, is owned by Parks Canada. They rehabilitated the building in 2020-21, including upgrading the washrooms. We operate those as public washrooms, a service we provide to Merrickville. The photo below shows the renovated interior. We have two summer students staffing the Depot and it is well worth visiting this summer.

Your Board has been working on a number of initiatives over the winter, including preparing our annual application for a grant from the federal government's Canada Summer Jobs (CSJ) program, which we rely on for support in order to operate our Rideau Canal visitor and interpretation centre, the Depot, in Merrickville. For reasons that don't make any sense, the government significantly cut the budget for the CSJ program this year. Thus Friends and many other community-based not-for-profit organizations, received only 30% (or less) of what we received last year. This has posed major challenges, but in our case we were able to draw on our modest organizational nest egg, which we have built in part from your membership fees and donations, and we will operate The Depot from June 12 to Labour Day Monday. But it remains a puzzle why the federal government has reduced the budget for a successful program that provides for the employment of students who need these earnings to continue their education.

Members of the Board have continued the dialogue with Parks Canada staff on the implementation of the new Rideau Canal management plan, which was formally approved in December 2022. As well as reiterating Friends' interest in and availability to assist Parks with elements of the management plan, we have also continued to push for progress on landscape studies at key lock stations as essential planning tools and for the return of the Rideau Canal Passport, which promoted both heritage and tourism. We recognize

that the Rideau Canal staff face obstacles, chief among them the constraint on the operating budget. But, given the popularity of the Rideau Canal for visitors (and the Trent-Severn, for that matter) and the economic importance of the Rideau to Eastern Ontario, it is hard to understand this short-sighted approach by Parks Canada headquarters.

Friends of the Rideau is a member of a national consortium of not-for-profit heritage organizations, led by the National Trust for Canada, developing a shared position with regard to draft legislation, Bill C-23, *The Historic Places of Canada Act*, to strengthen the management of places, persons and events of national historic significance which are owned by the federal government. This legislation would provide Parks Canada with updated tools to protect, among other things, National Historic Sites (NHS) such as the Rideau Canal. Canada is the only G7 country without federal laws to protect national heritage.

The draft act is lengthy, as you might expect, and from the perspective of the consortium has some major problematic sections. One of the most crucial issues is the risk that the label National Historic Site of Canada will be discarded. As well, the current draft legislation does not adequately ensure the protection of settings and landscapes associated with designated NHSs. If you are interested in following progress on this important federal government initiative, please consult the National Trust for Canada website, [nationaltrustcanada.ca](http://nationaltrustcanada.ca).

As noted above, The Depot is back in business this summer. Do come and visit us, we're open seven days aweek. We would very much enjoy seeing you and talking about the Rideau Canal.

- Hunter McGill

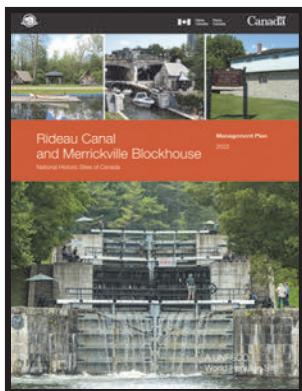
### Membership

It's that time of year again, members will find a membership renewal form with this newsletter (our membership year runs from June 1 to May 31). Please renew and consider a donation to help us with our work.

Thanks!



# RIDEAU CANAL MANAGEMENT PLAN



In mid-December, 2022, a new management plan for the Rideau Canal was tabled in Parliament, eight years after an updated plan was legally required to be produced. Despite receiving 50 written submissions during the spring 2021 "consultation" process, more than any Parks Canada site has ever received, Parks Canada chose to ignore most of those informed comments, making the management plan into a pro-forma process. The resulting plan not only does not reflect public input, it also overlooks many of Parks Canada's legislated requirements for heritage protection and presentation of the Rideau Canal. Four issues stand out:

**No commitment to heritage interpretation.** This is a mandated requirement for a National Historic Site of Canada (NHS) run by Parks Canada (part of maintaining the "commemorative integrity" of the site). UNESCO also has a similar requirement for World Heritage Sites (WHS). Parks Canada does not provide heritage interpretation resourcing for the Rideau Canal. One of the main messages from many of the 50 written submissions is for Parks Canada to run the Rideau Canal as a heritage site.

**No commitment to maintain the built heritage fabric of the Rideau Canal.** Again, this is a legislative requirement (also part of maintaining the "commemorative integrity" of the site). In the plan, Parks Canada states: "By 2032, at least 70 percent of engineering works of national significance are maintained in fair or good condition." So, right off the bat Parks Canada is saying that having up to 30% of the engineering structures in poor or worse condition is okay. And, significant in its omission, is a commitment to maintaining the non-engineering heritage structures such as blockhouses, lockmaster houses, etc.

**No commitment to meet any UNESCO World Heritage Site requirements.** UNESCO requirements are notable by their complete absence in this plan. We were told by Parks Canada in 2018 that the new plan would be a combined NHS and WHS plan. The current WHS plan dates to 2006 and is obsolete (way out of date and Parks doesn't follow it anyway). In 2019, UNESCO wrote a letter of concern to the Government of Canada, stating in part that "the management system for the property does not currently provide adequate protection to the OUV [outstanding universal value] or the setting thereof". The 2022 plan does not address that concern or other World Heritage Site requirements.

**No commitment to environment protection.** Environmental protection, including the ecological integrity of the Rideau Canal, is a responsibility of Parks Canada, since the Rideau Canal is a federally owned waterway. The environmental protection of the Rideau Canal is a jurisdictional mess, which a group of academic researchers, in trying to graph those jurisdictions, called a "horrendogram". The management plan does not provide any clarity, or detail Parks Canada's specific responsibilities, many of which they simply ignore.

There are many other issues, including the fact that it's not a management plan by any definition of what a real management plan should look like. Their last plan (2005 - abandoned in 2012) was far better done, it was an actual management plan.

The plan is already out of date. For instance, the plan states "At Jones Falls Lockstation, costumed interpreters provide a look into the life of a lockmaster in the 1800s at Sweeney House, while the original blacksmith shop showcases the role of the forge in the construction of the canal." These were not open in 2022 and will remain closed in 2023. Parks Canada has also closed the Rideau Canal Visitor Centre (formerly Rideau Canal Museum) in Smiths Falls. Parks Canada's current motto is "450 000 km<sup>2</sup> of stories await you at Parks Canada administered places from coast to coast to coast!" As is often the case in recent years, Parks Canada does not walk their talk, certainly not on the Rideau Canal.

## 2023 Hours of Operation

## 2023 Fees

Dates	Days	Hours	
May 19—June 18	Mon to Thurs	10 am to 4 pm	Single Lockage & Return = \$ 1.00 per foot
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm	One Day = \$ 1.75/ft
			Transit (one way) = \$ 5.00/ft
June 19—Sept. 4	Mon to Thurs	9 am to 6 pm	Six Days (any six days) = \$ 5.50/ft
	Fri to Sun, holidays	9 am to 7 pm	Seasonal (power boats) = \$ 9.50/ft
Sept. 5—Oct. 9	Mon to Friday	10 am to 4 pm	Seasonal (paddle craft) = \$ 4.75/ft
	Sat to Sun, holidays	9 am to 5 pm	Mooring (overnight) = \$ 1.00/ft

## BLUE GREEN ALGAE & AQUATIC VEGETATION

While excessive aquatic vegetation is a perennial issue on the Rideau Canal, a new concern is potentially toxic blue-green algae blooms, which are now prevalent in many parts of Canada, including the Rideau Canal. The potential for these on the Rideau Canal is now increasing as a result of climate change. While both “excess” aquatic vegetation and blue-green algae blooms have their root in excess nutrient loading, primarily phosphorus, it is a much more complex story than that. We’ll start with blue-green algae.

Despite the name, blue-green algae isn’t actually a type of algae, it’s a cyanobacteria that occurs naturally in ponds, streams, rivers and lakes. Those bacteria act very similarly to regular algae and so calling them algae is a more understandable description. Most of the time they are benign and of no danger to humans or animals. But, in certain conditions they can form into a bloom and that can generate toxins that are quite harmful to humans and pets.

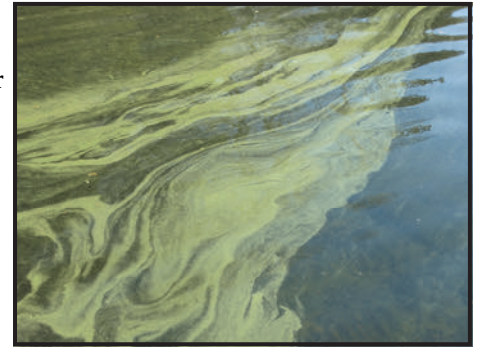
Blue-green algae thrives on phosphorus, the amount of available phosphorus in a lake will determine how much blue-green algae can develop. With too much phosphorus and the right environmental conditions, they can bloom. A bloom is a large mass or scum in the water. While often bluish-green in colour, it can also be just green or turquoise in colour. Blooms generally form in warm still water and so are most often seen in late summer or early fall in our region. A few days of no wind, or a sheltered bay, can provide the conditions for a bloom to form. A new bloom can smell like freshly mown grass, older blooms can smell like rotting garbage.

Most blooms are in fact non-toxic, but some can develop toxins. If you or a pet swim in a bloom with toxins, the most common symptoms that result from exposure to the toxins are itchy, irritated eyes and skin. If large quantities of the toxins are swallowed, then people develop flu-like symptoms (i.e. headache, fever, abdominal pain, nausea). If you suspect a bloom and you draw drinking water from the lake, stop using your water – home treatment systems (filters, UV) don’t remove the toxins. Boiling the water or adding chlorine also doesn’t work, in fact doing either can make it worse. The only way to know if a bloom is toxic is to have it tested. The Ontario Ministry of the Environment does this testing. If you suspect a bloom is happening in your water, call MOE’s Spill Action Hotline at 1-800-268-6060 to report it. They will send someone out to verify that it is a real bloom and will take samples and test them for toxins. In the meantime, do not use your water for drinking, cooking or bathing.

Our overabundance of aquatic vegetation is also due to excess nutrient loading. This comes from various sources. With the canal in Ottawa for instance, you only have to look at the manicured and presumably well fertilized lawns adjacent to the canal upstream in the Manotick area to see where some of the problem comes from. But it’s not just those lawns, it’s also the thousands of others within urban areas. Phosphorus from fertilization will eventually migrate to the lowest point in the water drainage, our rivers and lakes. In the central and southern Rideau, the bulk of the phosphorus loading comes from upland agriculture, via surface and groundwater drainage, and also from the air, with phosphorus aerosoled off open fertilized fields. While the source loading for the overall Rideau has never been researched, studies from other equivalent areas shows that agricultural runoff (surface and groundwater) accounts for about 60% of the phosphorus loading, with the aerosol component an added 25%.

Waterfront owners also contribute, which is why it is critical to have a vegetated buffer zone on your property to absorb nutrients before they hit the lake or river and to have a properly working septic system. This is a focus of our local conservation authorities, the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority and the Cataraqui Region Conservation Authority. Many municipalities have development controls such as site plans (now being reinstated after being removed in last year’s Ontario Bill 23) to help mitigate a property’s impact on the water quality of our lakes and rivers. So, if you do have a lawn, leave it natural and don’t fertilize it since most of those nutrients will end up in the water (even if you have a vegetated buffer zone).

I noted at the beginning that it is a complex issue. Nutrients such as phosphorus in our lakes and rivers are needed. It supports algae and aquatic vegetation which supports the food chain required by aquatic life such as fish. So we don’t want to eliminate phosphorus, the main issue is human activity that results in excess phosphorus loading. Dr. Smol of Queen’s University, who has studied this issue for decades, notes that he and his research group are now seeing the effects of climate change, in particular a shorter ice cover season and lower winds in mid-summer. The shorter ice cover encourages more algae growth (more sunlight available in the water column) and the lower winds result in more algae blooms. He notes that the pre-canal Rideau, which his group has researched through sediment core studies, had very good water quality. While we can’t return to that era (lakes and rivers surrounded by forests with minimal human impact), we can all do our part to ensure we try to make our water quality better, not worse.



**Blue-Green Algae Bloom**

Photo MOE.