

A tourist's eye view



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By Nate Smelle

At one time or another in our lives each of us finds ourselves walking in a tourist's shoes. Whether we are exploring a new community or traversing treacherous terrain in a foreign landscape, inevitably we must step outside of our comfort zone when travelling.

As someone who enjoys experiencing new places, I have learned to appreciate this often uncomfortable footwear for what it is: a means to an end. The end being a more comprehensive worldview.

Sure, as we sit in our tents, cottages or hotel rooms bandaging blisters and rationing our travelling resources we all yearn for the comforts of couch and home. However, too much complacency with our daily routine puts a harness on our own potential for personal growth. If we don't open ourselves to such new experiences ? experiences that may cause us fear, anxiety or discomfort ? we consciously choose to live in a world much smaller and less diverse than it truly is.

Unlike any other industry, tourism gives us the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the world and each other. Earlier this month, while covering Bancroft's 56th annual Rockhound Gemboree, the Bancroft Arts and Crafts Guild's exhibition in Millennium Park, and the Pride parade in Maynooth I had the chance to meet several people visiting North Hastings from around the globe. In just two days I managed to speak with people from South Korea, the Dominican Republic, Scotland, Germany and the United States. After each of these conversations I walked away having learned something new about the world we share.

During these exchanges I shared information about myself and why I decided to make North Hastings my home. When I explained to them that I originally chose to live here because I prefer life among nature as opposed to life in the city, they all seemed to understand. Their most common response to my explanation of why I reside here being ?It is so beautiful here!?

Each of the people I spoke with also told me that they were visiting the area from a larger urban centre. What made this place special to them were the trees, lakes, rivers, wildlife and fresh air. For them, these resources were scarce. For them, being immersed in our natural landscape ? an environment easily taken for granted considering it is the backdrop of our daily routines ? was reason enough to return.

Interestingly, none of these people had been here before, but most of them were in town for the Gemboree. It is worth noting however that nearly half of them were passing through on their way to Algonquin Park, stopping only because they noticed crowds of people in the park and on the sidewalks.

Another reason a few of them told me they were enjoying their visit to North Hastings was the creativity of the people here.

Thinking of how grateful I have been for tips I have received from locals while travelling, and realizing that we shared an interest in nature and art, I recommended they pay a visit to our local art galleries, Eagle's Nest Park and Egan Chutes.

Thinking about how mutually-enriching the interactions I had with these individuals were later on the following week, it dawned on

me how much potential the tourism industry in North Hastings has to enrich our quality of life. Blessed with an abundance of natural beauty and a wealth of creative people we have everything necessary to build a future that is both ecologically and economically sustainable. All we need to do is recognize the value of our home as if we were tourists seeing it for the first time.