

COMMUNITY COLUMNIST: The rare gem that runs through Hamilton | Your online community newspaper for Hamilton, Ontario and area

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By Chris Hamilton, special to the News

Once upon a time in a city called Hamilton there was an idea to build a world-class facility, then called (a mouthful): The Red Hill Valley Niagara Escarpment World Biosphere Reserve Interpretive Centre.

Why? Well, the escarpment had just been declared by the United Nations as a World Biosphere Reserve, just like the Galapagos or the Amazon Rain Forest!

Since Hamilton is the largest municipality along it, this centre was intended to be the urban gateway to the escarpment. Theatres, restaurants, displays ... a multi-million-dollar facility somewhere near the Red Hill Valley — then, the largest untouched forest/river valley in the heart of Hamilton.

As you can guess, the project came close, but never got completely off the ground. After facing numerous challenges, 10 years after the first idea came to the table, a once-grand scheme lay in ruins.

By this time, the project's official name was the Giant's Rib Discovery Centre (GRDC). The Giant's Rib was chosen for its romantic history; Canada's first settlers knew it from our First Nations as the petrified rib of a giant.

A group of dedicated volunteer supporters decided to establish a small interpretive centre, created information displays and began developing public programs to tell people all about the Niagara Escarpment.

Thanks to Hamilton Conservation Authority, a weekend home in the Dundas Valley was provided and the group has been running programs there since 2006.

Today, the GRDC is hitting the road and bringing the escarpment to you! New guided hiking programs are offered in Dundas, Albion Falls and Crawford Lake. The centre and website are getting makeovers and traveling resources will allow us to take our information on the road, reaching more people than ever.

Why is this important to you? For now, consider that Hamilton's "Mountain" is a fossilized sea bed from a time when life on Earth was brand new. It has travelled from the equator where it began, has been buried by seas and ice, exposed by glaciers creating Hamilton's waterfalls, is home to cedars more than 500 years old, is home to 25 per cent of Canada's endangered species and is a World Biosphere Reserve running right through our city.

Too many Hamiltonians don't know they're living in such a rare gem. Hopefully now, a few more do.

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