

Ontario Parks Award Presentation to Dr. George Priddle

A highlight of the PRFO meeting was the granting of the first *Ontario Parks Heritage Protection Award* to Dr. George Priddle in recognition of his outstanding contributions in teaching, research and advocacy associated with parks and protected areas. With these credentials, Dr. Priddle is a most deserving recipient of this first *Ontario Parks Heritage Protection Award*.

The award is a framed print of a painting by Dwayne Harty, featuring a winter scene of the hilly forested landscape around Fork Lake in Algonquin Park. The inscription reads:

Ontario Parks Heritage Protection Award

George B. Priddle, PhD

**For Outstanding Contributions to the Provincial Park System
through Research, Teaching and Advocacy**

February, 1998

Mr. Norm Richards, Managing Director, Ontario Parks, presided over the award ceremony which included warm commentaries and tributes to Dr. Priddle from two of his first graduate students, Mr. Cameron Clark, now the Assistant Deputy Minister for the Field Services Division of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and Mr. Larry Douglas, now the Director of the Corporate Affairs Branch with the Ministry. Following are the tributes presented at the ceremony by Messrs. Clark and Douglas.

Tribute to Dr. George Priddle by Mr. Cam Clark

Norm Richards gave me some reference material this morning to assist me with this pleasant task. But this is one presentation where I do not need notes. I will try to incorporate everything that is here, but this is something, Norm, that really comes from the heart.

About two weeks ago, I had a call from Tom Beechey, whom many of you know through his lengthy involvement with parks and protected areas, when he informed me about the *Ontario Parks Heritage Protection Award* and the idea of granting the first of these awards to George Priddle, here, today. I can't tell you how delighted that I was at the time—it made me feel really tremendous! So I was very, very eager to have the opportunity, George, to come and offer a few words of congratulations from me, and on behalf of the Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario Parks, and a host of people in Ontario and far beyond who would want to share the warmth, affection and respect that comes with this award.

I had some time to think about this when I was flying in from Thunder bay last night. I had a glass of wine and reflected on my relationship with George and our involvement in parks and protected areas over the last few years, when it occurred to me that I met you 30 years ago! I had another glass of wine—I got over it.

I need to recount a little bit of personal history because I think that George has touched so many of us, and he has touched so many of us in this way. Thirty years ago, I was what you would characterize in demographic terms as a semi-dependent, undirected second year student, trying to find his way academically, and a little unclear about my future. I can recall my wife-to-be saying: "You know, Cam you have tried a few things—business, history—maybe you should try geography." The mother science! Not having a clear sense of where I was going, I thought that I would do that. So I did.

What a tremendous turning point for me, because as I got into the geography programme, one of the first professors whom I met was this young fellow named Dr. George Priddle, recently from Clark University in Worcester Massachusetts. Up until then, I just had not found anyone who captured just what I wanted, and this guy was bright, he was congenial with a nice sense of humour and a contemporary view of things. You have no idea, George, what an impact that had on me and many, many other people.

And I listened to George carefully. When George read Leo Marx's *Machine in the Garden*, I read. There are many things like that, that I remember. I also remember somebody who brought the young people, like me, together, and encouraged us to talk about resource management issues in a congenial setting where people were encouraged to think freely and to engage in a dialogue. And it didn't matter whether it was in the classroom or the Blue Moon Hotel, we did it all, and we had a great time doing it. It kind of brought a perspective of academia that I had not experienced before, and one that I have carried with me throughout my career.

In retrospect, the thing that most impresses me about George is that, if it wasn't for him, I would not be here today. And I was trying to figure out what it was that encouraged me, and there are a number of things that George brought together as a package. He was a geographer, first and foremost—a convenient acronym that kind of lets you do a lot of things. So, part of what George brought was this concept of man and environment relationships, and that was sort of fundamental to everything that we did.

The second thing that George brought was this fascination with what we then called “perception and behavioural studies in resource management”, really looking at the human dimensions and everything that we deal with in the resource management business. And there is not a day that goes by when I don't say: “You know, you were right!” It is so much a part of what I do now, so much a part of what the Ministry of Natural Resources does, and it is so fundamental to getting the job done.

The next thing is this real fascination with parks and protected areas. For George, this found substance in Algonquin Provincial Park, which is a physical reality that has tremendous symbolic content for him. And for people like me, this was just a wonderful menu which opened the door for all kinds of ideas and discussions, and frankly, let me and numerous other people pursue careers in the resource management sector. First of all, there is Larry Douglas, who is sitting on George's left side. He and I worked together as graduate students, and in fact, if it wasn't for Larry, I probably would not have made it through school. George, Larry and I, in particular, pursued research in Algonquin Park. George had done the seminal work on wilderness perception, and I did the follow up study—mine was slightly better.

Anyway, some of the students that were there then, whom I know George remembers with fondness include John Lewis, Kevin McNamee, Ken Cox, Ken Morrison, Gary Allan, Ken Cain, Sheila MacFeeters, Brian Howard, Barton Feilders, and the list goes on. I know that George had some 50 masters and PhD students that he has worked through the system. And for all of us, George, you did a wonderful job. You peaked our enthusiasm, encouraged us to be a little innovative—and probably a little left of centre, in a healthy kind of way. You brought a kind of infectious enthusiasm, that made us want to be part of the game—the resource management game. Now, what more can I say. It was great, and I am absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to come and say these few words about you.

There are a few other points that I do want to mention. In a more institutional setting, George also had a very active life. He served for seven years as the first Chair of the Ontario Provincial Parks Council. Special advisory committees, such as the Parks Council, sit at the interface between politicians and bureaucrats. And so if you were a George Priddle, you were stuck between a couple of bureaucrats who tried to control the agenda, and the political side that was a moving target. And for anyone to last for seven years in any position like that is a very impressive achievement. And I know why George succeeded—he has a tremendous facility to deal with people. And I know that in that particular enterprise, it required a lot of tact, a lot of diplomacy, a tremendous sense of humour, and very much a leadership role in terms of bringing people together

and exploring ideas—whether you were dealing with Quetico or Algonquin, or whatever.

George, as many of you know, was also a member to the Canadian Delegation of the Second World Conference on Parks and Protected Areas in Wyoming, and the Third World Conference on Parks and Protected Areas in Bali, Indonesia. He was also part of the Canadian Delegation at the IUCN Conference in ChristChurch, New Zealand. In recent years, he has been involved in trails and greenways, and if you know George, he has been involved in these initiatives right from the beginning. It did not matter if it was in the Baden Sandhills or the Grand River, George and his students were involved in one way or another. George continues to employ students in a variety of functions, just like he did with me, Larry, Ken Cox and a whole bunch of other people.

I think that you should also know that George has authored three books, and chapters in 10 other books. He has written more than 100 papers and reports on parks and protected areas and associated outdoor recreation interests. And so, you can see that when I received the call about this event, I thought “Boy, what a great guy to receive this award”. I am so proud to be able to be here, and to be a part of this celebration. And George, I would just like to say, on behalf of myself, everybody here, and numerous others who have touched you in this particular business over the years, thank you very, very much—it is a wonderful accomplishment! .

Tribute to Dr. George Priddle by Mr. Larry Douglas

Like Cam, I share many fond memories of George. I guess that it was three years later, after Cam first met him, that I came into contact with George. I certainly share the affection that Cam does, and as Cam was speaking, I was thinking of all of the grad classes that we had at the Blue Moon Hotel, and how that tended to be symbolic of George's way of doing things. It wasn't always the standard way, but it certainly was a good way. I am certainly pleased that George is being given this award, and I think it is a real tribute to someone who has made a significant impact on parks and protected areas in Ontario and Canada, and particularly our perspectives on them.

George always saw things from a unique perspective, and I think that this is what created the innovation and attractiveness of working with him. George's contributions stem from what I think of as several inter-related strengths which are difficult to separate. George is an innovative and free thinker. He loves to breakdown boundaries between disciplines, and he loves to break down jurisdictional barriers and institutional jealousies. He just loves to do that.

He saw, I believe, breaking down such barriers and boundaries as a means of creating new ideas. I think that he reveled in situations when he got different groups together. He particularly had fun when dealing with a group with a unique view. He would either challenge that view himself, or he would create situations where other disciplines or perspectives would come together and they would challenge each other. He would just sit there and smile. When the debate went on, and new ideas emerged, somebody would say: "We are not getting anywhere clinging to our own roots; how do we bring our perspectives together?" That's when George knew that progress was being made. I think that was really the unique ability of George. He could bring together people with diverse perspectives; he could organize them in settings that were not confrontational, that enabled them to break down barriers and develop new solutions.

Another characteristic of George that I liked was that he was a rebel. Not only did he like to bring the different perspectives together, but he liked to see the sparks flying. When he brought people with different perspectives together, there was something beyond 'We'll get a good idea.'—'This will be a good show, too!' He enjoyed that, and we always knew that.

We talked about Algonquin Park. A story about George and Algonquin Park. I do not know whether this is true, or not, but I understand that when he was working in Algonquin Park as a student, he commuted one night to a bar in Huntsville in a road grader. I'll leave that to the historians to document whether this is true or not.

George loved to play, loved to create new ideas, and loved to challenge existing orthodoxy. I think that is really his contribution, and he has brought this not only to parks and protected areas, but also to academic settings. Certainly when Cam and I were in geography, at Waterloo, probably what attracted us to George, more than anything else, was that you did not need to worry about boundaries. Later, George became part of a department with a perspective even wider than

geography, known then as the Man-Environment Department and now as the Environment and Resource Studies Department.

George, I really appreciate what you done for us and for the province in breaking down historical ways of looking at things, adding creativity, and getting the job done. Thanks.

Remarks by George Priddle

Thank you very, very much.

I won't keep you very long, because I know that we are already running late for lunch. But I can't tell you how thrilled that I am to receive this award, and especially to receive it from two of my first graduate students, Larry and Cam, whom I did not know were going to be here today. And so today is an especially great thrill for me.

Also mentioned in passing was John Lewis. The first graduate student whom I had was John Lewis and the second was Cam Clark—so we have Lewis and Clark. And they ended up in a canoe one day checking out the French River as a heritage river, and they hit the first rapid and over went the canoe. I'm told that's a true story. The road grader—I can't remember.

But it has been very exciting being involved with parks and parks people, and a big thrill for me seeing so many familiar faces here today—all the memories rushing back to Algonquin Park, which I guess was my first real entree into the parks business—and I've kind of been at it ever since then. It has been a real thrill and of course you meet wonderful people doing it.

From some of the things that we heard this morning, it's a business that's ongoing. We massage the language, but it's the same stuff, you know, and we're wrestling with the same problems, so it's an unending battle.

I am retired now and enjoying it, but I am still quite involved in some things, like rails and trails, and having students involved in this work in the local area where I live in the Regional Municipality of Waterloo—so it keeps my hand in it.

Thank you very much gentlemen, I really appreciate your being here today. Thank you so much to the organization for this wonderful presentation and this wonderful award.

I'll be around this afternoon, since I am moderating the first panel.

Thank you.