

The Eramosa Karst, an Urban Karst Park in Hamilton, Ontario

Marcus Buck, B.Sc., P.Geo

The Eramosa Karst is an outstanding example of karst located within the City of Hamilton in an area that is undergoing rapid urban expansion. It contains numerous diverse karst features: sinkholes, sinking streams, dry valleys, caves and springs. The scientific and educational value of this karst was first recognized by karst experts in 2000. At that time, the land was managed by the Ontario Realty Corporation and was slated for development. The former City of Stoney Creek put a development hold on the area pending scientific study. In April 2003, geoscientists completed an evaluation of the values of the karst and the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) formally recognized its significance by designating the area as an earth science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). The Province of Ontario has since donated the "Core Area" of the Eramosa Karst ANSI to the Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA), in October 2006. The HCA is currently constructing a trail network with interpretive panels throughout the property, as well as parking facilities and an interpretive kiosk at the main entrance. They plan to officially open the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area in 2008 as part of their 50th anniversary celebrations. Meanwhile, the City of Hamilton has begun the planning process for developing the surrounding lands, although not without opposition. A group of area residents have recently established the Friends of the Eramosa Karst with the goal of preserving the remaining Provincial lands within the ANSI. Regardless of what happens to the surrounding lands, the karst lands within the conservation area will become the first urban karst park in Ontario with environmental protection. This park will provide the public with a great opportunity to learn

about karst. It also provides an excellent site for university-based research. The establishment of the park is an excellent example of proactive planning by politicians and agency staff with the support of geoscientists and the neighboring community.

Marcus Buck, B.Sc., P.Geo studied karst geology and geochemistry as a graduate student at McMaster University under the supervision of Dr. Derek Ford, a world-renown expert in karst. Mr. Buck has operated a consulting business since 1999, Karst Solutions, and specializes in environmental geoscience in karst lands. He has been an avid caver since his youth and is a recognized expert in the caves and karst of Ontario. As a consultant, he developed a comprehensive cave management plan for Parks Canada based on an inventory of 230 caves on the Bruce Peninsula. He has evaluated some of the key karst areas of Ontario as earth science Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest for the Ministry of Natural Resources. He has also consulted for the private sector conducting hydrogeological investigations, including the evaluation of hazardous sites and environmental planning. Mr. Buck is a resident of Hamilton and played a key role in the establishment of the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area. He was the lead author of the MNR report that led to its designation as an ANSI, and he is currently participating in the development of the site as a conservation area. Mr. Buck has led more than 20 tours of the Eramosa Karst for agency staff, politicians and the public.

FRIENDS OF ERAMOSA KARST

The Eramosa Karst Park will be a great place for people to learn what karst is and how it functions. The natural recharge area was assumed to be included in the park, but



Potruff Cave

someone in the planning office made some changes. There is still a little bit of time to get this important piece of land included in the park, but not much time. The Ontario government owns the property, but it is managed by their development branch, Ontario Realtor Corporation

Development in the recharge area will change the natural water recharge of the karst and the wetland that the springs feed. Also, urban sewage lines are not water-tight, so the karst and wetland could end up getting contaminated with raw sewage. Development may also interfere with the natural groundwater flow to the area. Digging of foundations and sewers could give the water an easy path to flow away from the present karst features, thus destroying the natural functions in this karst park and the long-term teaching potential.

A group in Stoney Creek, Ontario, Canada, started up and is fighting to fully protect the recharge area of the new Eramosa Karst park. The land adjacent to the park is owned by the Ontario Province, so letter writing could get the politicians to act. Friends of Eramosa Karst Web site has good information <http://www.friendsoferamosakarst.org/> Or contact Greg Warchol for updates gregwarchol64@msn.com



Marcus Buck surveying in Olmstead Cave



Potruff Cave