

## *Through the Garden Gate*

# 'A Place Of Natural Beauty'

by Carol Krawchuk-Howard

*"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."* John Muir

We had the itch to travel on the long week-end. I checked a few things out on the internet, made reservations, packed our bags and off we went, up into the Kawarthas. Despite the rain, we had a wonderful trip. The trees already indicated a change in the seasons. Colourful jewels of amber, ruby and garnet stood out among the rest.

We stopped near Perth to buy some fresh wild blueberries which I snacked on during our drive and took home some wild blueberry jam, which is quickly disappearing at our house. We stopped at some lovely shops and cozy country stores, one that was home to a rather spirited little Calico kitten playing inside a large wicker basket but loving the attention of passers by. We enjoyed some lovely suppers, comfy accommodations and saw some wildlife but the highlight of our trip was found in the middle of a county road near Merrickville.

It's called **'Rideau Woodland Ramble.'**

Rideau Woodland Ramble is a garden centre and display gardens like no other that I've seen. It has a natural beauty that one has to experience. As we turned left and through the gates, we were instantly transported into a woodland paradise, wrapped in the arms of towering red pines, driving past all shapes, colours and sizes of conifers, Hostas and ferns. This long beautiful driveway led us to a small little area where we parked the car. As soon as I got out, all of my senses were awakened. Among the quiet and peace I heard birds chirping and singing, the scent of pine, evergreen and that of a fresh forested thicket danced around my nose and took me back to our days portaging in Algonquin, and for the eyes, there's so much to take in. My husband and I just stood still for a few minutes in awe of the entire surroundings.

The garden centre was next at our feet, a relaxing and very pretty area where you can mellow out and take in the attractive display of dwarf conifers, Hostas, grasses, shrubs, trees and perennials. They specialize in rare plant material for the Ottawa area; it didn't take us long before we found our first purchase. So Ed put it inside the charming glass enclosed gazebo (the largest in Canada), that contained the sales, information and seating area. We were very anxious to see the rest so we moved on.

As we started walking we could see we were in a very special place. Rideau Woodland Ramble, set on 7 acres, includes 3 acres of display gardens and trails. The entire grounds are connected with walkways and pathways. You feel like you're in a giant forest with many different rooms and hideaways to discover. A large, very lovely pond and fountain greeted us at the end of one path. It is home to some beautiful coy and provides shelter for other wildlife.

We paused for awhile to take it all in. Beyond the pond stands an exquisite statue that caught our eye. There are wonderful focal points all over, in perfectly placed settings. Next we decided to take a trail off to the left that led to a quiet and peaceful woodland forest. As we meandered slowly down the path, my eyes looked up first, to the magnificent spectacle of tall conifers and red pine, then they traveled along the forest floor, home to rich, green moss covered rocks, fallen trees and tree stumps invaded by delicate, tiny lichen. There was much to see and enjoy like the playful twisted plexiglass icicles hanging from some of the trees. They had a hypnotizing affect when you stared at them. There were glass orbs and spheres, lanterns and Buddha. There was even a pair of pheasants sitting on a stump in amongst the trees that looked amazingly real. My whole being felt so relaxed here. It's like when you go for a workout in a heated pool, afterwards you feel refreshed but also mind numbingly restful.

We came back out and took the road to the right which takes you past stunning rose bushes with captivating scents, trial gardens where specimens like the 'Red Bud Hazel,' can be seen as well as many other striking shrubs and trees, and an arresting display of Hostas, over 200 of them, from the world's biggest to the smallest. It boggles the mind. They're all so amazing and healthy in vibrant colour.

There is also an acidic area wherein lies Japanese maples, rhododendrons and azaleas. I absolutely loved all the unique and comical garden ornaments along all the pathways. I spied a collection of various frogs and toads, turtles and a chubby rabbit. Small stones unveiled themselves with words on them like 'imagination,' and 'dream.' It sounds like a lot to see and it is, but well worth it

and there are several seating areas, picnic tables, decorative chairs and benches when you need a rest.

When we were done, we went back to the gazebo to pay for our ornamental grass that we picked out and inside were the charming owners of Rideau Woodland Ramble, 'David Dunn and Robert Caron.' We spoke awhile and they revealed to us their, once upon a time dream that was today, an incredible reality. I say incredible because it all started after the 1998 ice storm that ripped through their area and swept away a good part of a mature stand of red pine and amputated many other trees. "From the ashes of this storm," David tells us, "rose the ramble."

There was major clearing of the site in 1999 and an extreme amount of work in 2000 but the centre was open for 15 days that same fall.

The year 2001 was the first full year of operation and since then it has been a thundering success, "We're not finished yet," adds David, "We have plans for much more."

"It's not without it's trials," Robert told us, "this year has been very dry except for the day when we had two hours of very heavy rain." "The pond overflowed and there were puddles everywhere, then the sun came out and everything went totally dry again," he explained. David told us that the gardens are so different in every season that we must come in the spring when all the rhodos and azaleas are in bloom.

We're planning that trip already.

Every garden I visit is a new and enjoyable experience that renews my spirit. Rideau Woodland Ramble is not just something to look at, but a beautiful place to simply be. That's what a garden should be, a soothing, uplifting sanctuary and this place most certainly was that. So if you need a break from your busy life and you're seeking out a new destination, take a visit to Rideau Woodland Ramble. It will both fascinate and bewitch you.

**Rideau Woodland Ramble** is located at 210 Burritt's Rapids Rd., County Rd. 23, Merrickville.

For more information you can contact them at 613-258-3797 or visit their web site, [www.rideauwoodlandramble.com](http://www.rideauwoodlandramble.com) , they are open from April- November, 9-5, seven days a week, rain or shine.