

Ernest Peter McNaughton (1914-2007)



When Ernie joined NONC he was already at an age when many members retire from club activities. Yet his surprising energy packed into so small a frame and his enthusiasm for hiking and naturalist pursuits kept him going for many years further prior to his death in 2007 at the age of 93.

Born in 1913 near Riding Mountain in the southern Manitoba countryside, he was youngest of a family of seven in an era when compelling chores were probably more pressing than contemplation of nature, so it was not until nearly half a century had passed before a series of events occurred that led Ernie to become an eminent amateur botanist.

During WW II Ernie served as a non-combatant in a medical unit where one of his colleagues, Wilfred Botham, became a particular friend. Wilfred must have been a remarkable person in his own right, furthering his interest in botany to a level rarely reached outside academic circles. His exploratory travels around Windsor in southern Ontario added numerous new species to the Ontario flora culminating in 1981 when he authored a new publication entitled *Plants of Essex County - A Preliminary List*. At some point the importance of Wilfred's carefully documented specimen collection led to its being acquired by a prominent herbarium in Ontario. This was a development that

appealed strongly to Ernie.

On a number of occasions in those years Ernie visited Ontario and travelled around with his friend on botanical trips learning technique and what points to look for in identifying specimens, doing the same later when Wilfred visited the Okanagan in the 1970s. From then on until Wilfred's demise a few years later Ernie used to send to him by mail puzzling specimens or those from groupings where he felt he had insufficient knowledge, both learning and benefitting from Wilfred's identifications.

In this way Ernie had already become a very competent botanist before he ventured to become a member of NONC. His first field trip as a naturalist was a visit to Mara Meadows with Joan Heriot and Peter Legg, amongst others, during which Joan pointed out the rare and significant plants growing there. When she reached Giant Helleborine Ernie commented that he had it growing on his own property in Vernon, a comment that caused a small botanical explosion when he was plainly told such a thing was impossible as this orchid was very rare and only grew in wet calcareous fens such as Mara Meadows. Of course, Ernie was right; he not only had that orchid but also several other notable items on his small wetland near the Vernon Cemetery - and hence forward his word and prowess on plant matters were respected and never questioned again..

About this time he and Malcolm Martin became partners in exploration and leading to many years of Tuesday trips to locations that appeared to have high potential, varying in type and elevation, for visiting at the optimum time during each growing season resulting annually in documentation and voucher specimens from several dozen newly discovered sites of rare plants. Several of these collections were for species never recorded before in BC and even one small non-native new for North America. All this material went first to the Conservation Data Centre of the Ministry of Environment before being lodged in the herbarium of the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria.

With a growing fund of information on interesting locations found on these forays, Ernie started taking a group of club members keen to enhance their prowess on weekly trips to the more accessible sites, thus adding a function to NONC's activities at a level it had not enjoyed before. Additionally, a need for socializing by someone living alone caused Ernie to start a weekly hiking group for those members who were finding the usual club hiking outings too demanding, again adding a useful function to the club. Both these popular activities continued for several years giving him a reputation as a dedicated and valuable club member. In recognition, NONC was pleased to present him with a Life Membership.

It might fairly be suggested that Ernie's meticulous attention to small characteristics while studying plant specimens echoed aspects of his working life during which at various times he was employed as a type setter on an array of printing machines, a job requiring unwavering attention to detail. The printing trade also led to his undertaking the unpopular task of typing the stencils for the NONC *Newspacket* at a time when it had to be laboriously produced monthly on a duplicating machine. Work for a purpose was never a barrier and, somewhat quixotic as it may seem, he even undertook to teach himself Greek and French for his own satisfaction.

His talent for proof reading extended beyond the North Okanagan Naturalists' Club so that when Bill Merrilees worked with Chet Lyons to revise an earlier book and release it as *Trees, Shrubs and Flowers to Know in Washington and British Columbia* Ernie reviewed their draft resulting in uncovering a formidable number of necessary alterations. Later both Ernie and Malcolm Martin were asked to become proof readers of the eight volume series *Illustrated Flora of British Columbia*, still the primary flora covering this province.

Ernie was an example to his fellow naturalists and to other people in general. Firstly, he showed that age is no barrier to the acquisition of knowledge and its enjoyment with others, and secondly, that it is most soundly gained by personal dedication and work rather than drawing on the knowledge of others. Additionally, it must be said that at no time could he be accused of flaunting his knowledge or disparaging that of others. It is not surprising that through a long life these and other characteristics stood him in good stead as a committed and active member of a number of humanitarian organizations. Altogether, a life well lived.