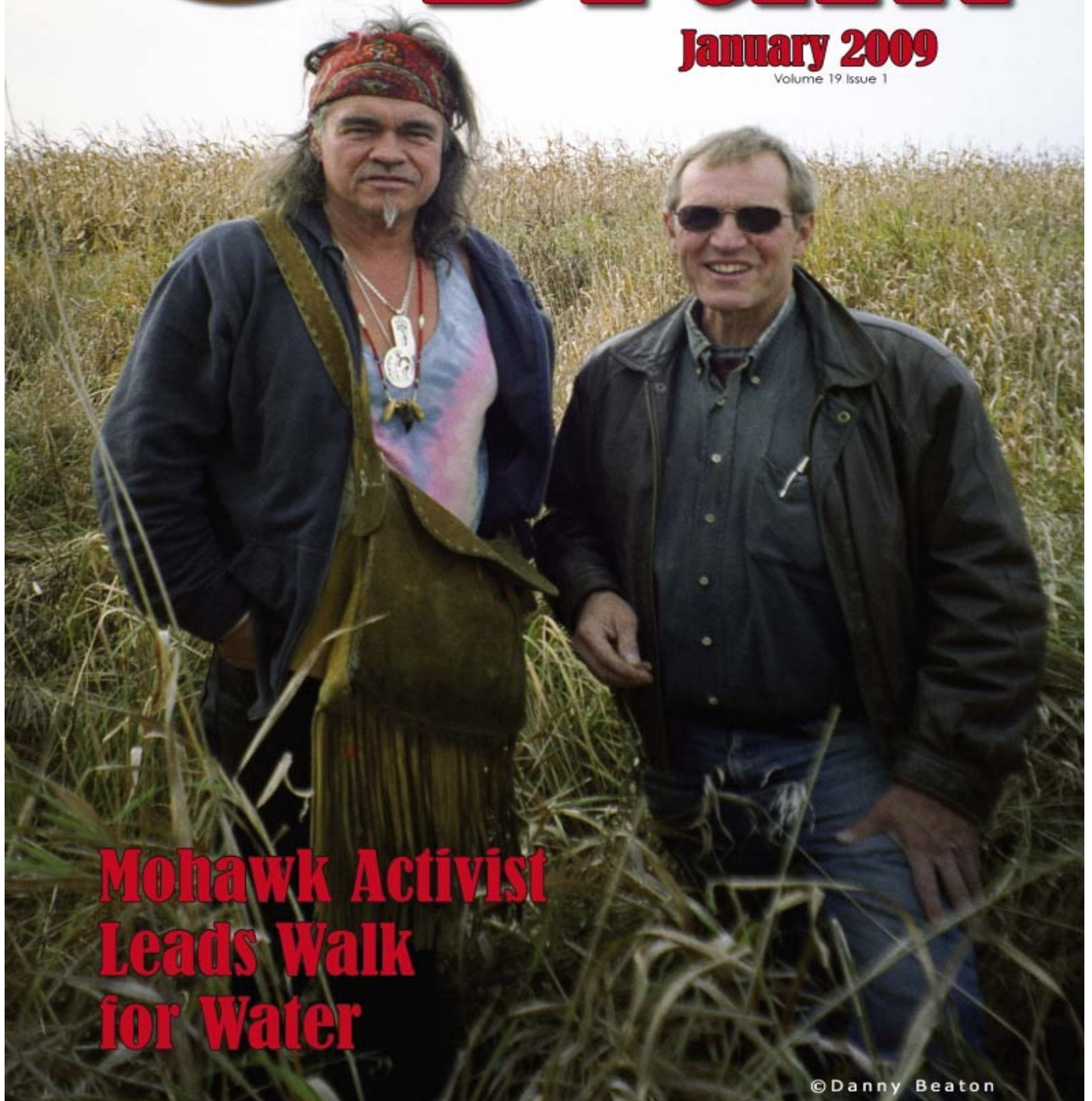




First Nations Drum

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**Mohawk Activist
Leads Walk
for Water**

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CANADA'S NATIONAL NATIVE NEWSPAPER

Mohawk Activist Leads Walk for Water

Story by Dr. John Bacher • Photos by Alicja Rozanska



Walk for life arrives in Toronto
Photo by Alicja Rozanska

Danny Beaton (Mohawk Six Nations, Turtle Clan) was inspired to organize a walk from a proposed dump site near Georgian Bay to Toronto because of the determined way that the Mohawk people throughout Canada have resisted environmentally disastrous urban sprawl. In his own community of Grand River, Mohawks such as Chief Alan MacNaughton, played a major role in the massive occupations that defeated the proposed Douglas Creek Estates development in Caledonia. In Deseronto, Mohawks such as Shawn Brant stopped a quarry from ripping up the earth. Akwesasne Mohawks rescued the St. Lawrence River from recent schemes to expand and deepen the Seaway, which would have involved blasting away some of the Thousand Islands. Oka Mohawks dramatically rescued a Great White Pine forest from a proposed combined golf course and residential subdivision.

World's Purest Water

Beaton seeks to protect the world's purest water from a garbage dump proposed at Site 41 in Tiny Township, Ontario. Samples of water taken from there have been found to have levels of lead, for instance, below that of the best comparable levels found even in Arctic ice cores from isolated areas such as Devon Island, where pure water froze before the onset of the industrial revolution. The purity of its waters, documented by the internationally respected scientist, Dr. William Shotyk, has made the groundwater flowing directly under the proposed dump site a baseline of perfection for scientists testing water purity from around the world. The proposed dump site is located near

Elmvale in Tiny Township on some 300 acres of predominately Class One and Two agricultural land. The site now provides base flow for the waters of a trout stream (MacDonald Creek) and is located within its floodplain. To construct the dump, some 225 million litres of the world's purest water would have to be pumped out of the ground to prevent the garbage pit from being flooded with groundwater infiltration.

In the May/June 2008 issue of Canadian Water Treatment magazine, Dr. Shotyk explained the reasons for the unusual purity of water in the Elmvale Clay Plain. He noted that, "some experts initially suggested that perhaps the groundwater is ancient." They were wrong, however, since the pure water "is in fact rainwater from the 1980s that has slowly percolated through the glacial debris that makes up the local hills and acts as the source for these groundwaters. Filtration through the soils—whose chemically reactive surface is provided by organic matter (humus), iron oxides, and clay minerals abound—purifies the water to a remarkable extent. The multibarrier concept of groundwater protection, it would seem, was developed by Mother Nature through rock weathering and soil formation long ago."

Struggle is Against Miller Waste Systems

Unless the world's purest water is pumped out first, the Site 41 waste pit would become a lake. This illustrates the similarities between the struggle to stop a dump here and the Adams Mine scheme to dump Toronto's garbage into a flooded mine pit (a plan which was eventually defeated). The Adams Mine pit is laced with

rocks that have been fractured by years of blasting and has a lake with beautiful clear waters. To permanently stop a dump from being constructed there, the Ontario legislature passed the Adams Mine Act (in 2004) that makes it illegal to have garbage dumps constructed in lakes. The similarity between the two dump proposals is the basis for Simcoe North MPP Garfield Dunlop's private members bill to kill the dump scheme at Site 41. Facilitating its passage through the Ontario legislature would be an easy way for the provincial government (headed by Dalton McGuinty) that passed the Adams Mine Lake Act to stop the construction of Dump Site 41, which may begin in mere months.

One of the major players behind the Adams Mine dump proposal was Miller Waste Systems. It is seeking to build a recycling plant adjacent to the dump site. Miller Waste was part of a consortium of interests behind the Adams Mine scheme, which included Notre Development, whose investors included Peter Minogue, the husband of local campaign manager of Ontario Premier Mike Harris of Ipperwash infamy. Harris' scheme for Dump Site 41 was linked to plans to privatize the Ontario Northland Railwa, which—if given the lucrative dollars of hauling garbage—would be a profitable prize for private investors. The Harris government also gutted the Environmental Assessment Act, accommodating the Adams Mine dump scheme.

While Harris' government gutted environmental laws to help their friends in companies behind Adams Mine, other parts of the world were developing waste laws that made burying garbage below ground illegal. This was done in both Nova Scotia

and the European Union.

Dump Site 41

Dump Site 41 sits on top of both the Alliston Aquifer and the bed rock channel of the ancient St. Lawrence River, which still flows below ground from Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario. The Alliston Aquifer is a more recent creation of the inter-glacial period, created by the sands of Sunnybrook Lake, a giant ancestor of Lake Ontario, that flourished in an inter-glacial period 25,000 to 45,000 years ago. The Laurentian Channel below it is much more ancient. It was the route of the St. Lawrence River, stretching from what is now Chicago to Quebec City before glaciers began to gouge out the Great Lakes some 250,000 years ago.

The bedrock channel links a web of aquifers (sources of pure groundwater) such as the Alliston, Holt, Kame Outwash, Mount Albert, Oak Ridges, and Schomberg aquifer complexes. The Oak Ridges Moraine, widely appreciated as Ontario's vital rainbarrel, straddles the former great valley of the buried St. Lawrence, which is known by geologists as the Georgian Bay Linear Zone. These aquifers supply water for the communities of Aurora, Newmarket, Bradford, and Holland Landing—all centres that the Walk for Water led by Beaton went through. They also give critical base flow to the rivers, keeping them flowing during dry summer periods. Many of these rivers, such as the Holland and Don, which flow across the Walk for Water route were ceremonially honoured by Beaton along the way. The term Yonge Street Aquifer is often used to describe the Alliston Aquifer Complex, since the route (often called Highway 11) is so



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Allysa Richards copying the Sacred Eagle Staff with Dr. John Becker leading the Walk for Water through the Dendroica Marshes. Photo by: Barry Beaton

prominent in Ontario. The highway above both the Alliston Aquifer and the St. Lawrence Channel was the route for two-thirds of the length of Beaton's Walk for Water.

Leader of the 23-year struggle against Dump Site 41, Steve Ogden has a prized map of the Alliston Aquifer from 1977. It has subsequently been banned by the Ontario government, aware of its explosive potential to excite demands for tough restrictions on land use, characteristic of wellhead protection zones that safeguard important sources of ground water. One of the leading experts on the Laurentian Channel, Professor Nick Eyles, has warned about the potential for contamination of ground water from abusive land use practices above it. In a paper titled "The Environmental Consequences of Bedrock Jointing in Southern Ontario," Eyles together with fellow geologist A.E. Scheidegger warn that "[t]he infills of bedrock channels form major groundwater aquifers, influence regional groundwater flows and contaminant migration to Lake Ontario, and may localize the release of thermogenic methane and radon within heavily urbanized surface environments." These words are quite foreboding on a hike route through Simcoe County that has been dubbed the "Wild West" of urban sprawl in Ontario.

The Walk for Water

Seventy-five people, including the Township of Tiny's Municipal Council, MPP Garfield Dunlop, and eight children, gather at Steve Ogden's

farm. At the farm, Beaton begins the walk to Queen Park by delivering the Longhouse Thanksgiving Address. Here, Beaton begins by laying particular emphasis on the rivers below us that carry Mother's Earth's blood.

As we walk towards the dump site, a flock of around one hundred Canada Geese are flying in V-formation. They are heading from above the dump site, along the course of MacDonald Creek Valley that connects to the Wye River. It is the site of the Wye Marsh, an important waterfowl sanctuary. This passage along a stream valley threatened by the dump is hauntingly significant of the journey on which we are embarking.

At the dump site, Beaton reverently kisses the ground to express reverence for the earth and its waters beneath. We witness a bulldozer transform the quiet back-country lane into a super highway for the future sprawling industrial empire of Miller Waste.

After leaving the dump site heading towards Elmvale, we cross an organic dairy farm. Here we dramatically witness what we are walking for: The world's purest water gushes forth without the aid of a pump, by natural pressure. Here we all gather to drink the water and place it on our faces in a blessing. An official government sign indicates that water here is tested every three months to ensure its safety. Ogden's more colourful sign, which has been frequently vandalized at night by the sinister secretive dump supporters, warns, "The World's Purest Water—Dump Site 41 Will Take Care of That."

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Water Walk Cont from page 17

We have a demanding 20-mile walk between Elmvale and Midhurst, causing Beaton to order the support van to pick me up for the last mile. All the way, we pass through County Forests. These were planted between 1920 to 1990 to reverse the ruthless deforestation that had turned much of Simcoe County into a wasteland of blowing sand, like the Sahara Desert. I believe that future generations will view our digging out aquifers to bury garbage as insane as 19th century farmers clearing trees with massive forest fires.

At the county headquarters, we arrive just in time to deliver glass bottles of the world's purest water to Simcoe County councillors. This gesture is done in order to persuade a few pro-dump councillors to reverse their support. Only a few need to change their minds, since Simcoe County voted to approve the dump by a narrow 16-15 vote two years ago.

On the second day, torrential rains turn the band of walkers into a more select nine. We arrive soaked and exhausted at the Simcoe Hotel, where we are soon revived by a nourishing bowl of pea soup. We get a burst of hope when Steve Ogden's cell phone rings for an interview with a reporter from Canadian Press. This achieves one of our goals—to focus more attention to the issue beyond Simcoe County. At the same time, people in the hotel listen in and thank us for taking up the walk, typical of the amazing support along the way. This includes honks, cheers, and deliveries of free socks.

The third day has rain turn into a fierce blizzard. Beaton leads us safely through the whirling blinding snows with his sacred staff with its feathers blowing in the wind. We are down to a few walkers, one of whom, Hugh Anson-Cartwright, is a fit 78-year-old veteran who has been battling the dump scheme for nine years. Our spirits are lifted up in these circumstances by the first appearance on the walk of a Red-Tailed hawk and by the sudden appearance of Alicja Rozanska joining us by getting off the Yonge Street bus.

The snow stops on the fourth day, and the skies become clear and sunny. We walk to Bradford where, at the end of the day, Beaton honours the Holland River where we are greeted by the sight of a flock of Canvas Back ducks. This is the biggest stream that flows from the various aquifers linked to the Oak Ridges Moraine and the Laurentian Channel we are walking above.

We walk to Aurora, a city where the ancient buried bedrock Laurentian Channel splits in two—one flowing under the Humber River, the other the Don. Here Danny Beaton, Steve Ogden, and I give an address to the environmental studies club at

Cardinal Carter High School. The task is made easier by the presence next to the school of a water tower full from the waters replenished by the aquifers and buried St. Lawrence River that we have been walking over in such deep thought for the past four days.

We continue walking to a compelling picture of the war zone of environmental struggles to save the Oak Ridges Moraine from urban sprawl. We see one of the victories of that struggle, Bond Lake. It is a beautiful kettle lake, lined with a forest of white pine trees. It was created when a giant block of ice from retreating glaciers got trapped in the gravel of the Oak Ridges Moraine. Although this land is destined to eventually become a protected park, through a land exchange subject to years of court battles, it still looks like a war zone because the homes purchased by speculators hoping to cash in are still there, boarded up and abandoned, and no park facilities are evident.

When we enter Toronto, although still getting supportive honks from drivers, our only official greeting is the officious reception given by the security guard of a big box store. He harasses the driver of our support vehicle, who braves his taunts; the driver briefly gives us snacks before leaving the virtually empty parking lot.

On the last day of our Walk for Water, we arrive at Queen's Park. The walk exceeds our expectations. Our numbers are supplemented by 300 people from Tiny Township who drove to Toronto or came in the two buses. There are many reporters and television cameras. The political speakers are helpful. By his presence, MPP Garfield Dunlop puts pressure on Premier Dalton McGuinty to pass his private members bill, Andrea Horwath, MPP Hamilton Centre, reminds us that the simple separation of waste from organics will extend the life span of Simcoe County's current dumps for another forty years. And on hand to speak out for the water is Stuart Trew of the Council of Canadians.

Our spiritual walk has built up support for a needed turning point in history.

Since the Walk for Water to stop Dump Site 41 has passed with the support of our National Chief Phil Fontaine, a Facebook campaign will launch at the Queen's Park Media Studio in Toronto on Thursday, January 29, 2009 at 11:00 AM. All native and non-native students, teachers, and anyone willing to help stop Dump Site 41 on our surface springs in Tiny Township and the aquifers of Georgian Bay, please sign the Facebook petition or send email to beatondanny@yahoo.ca, stephenogden@sympatico.ca, or strew@canadians.org for more information.



Danny Beaton, Stephen Ogden. Headwaters of McDonald Creek to Wye River to Georgian Bay area of Surface Springs. Photo by Alicja Rozanska

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