

# Let Nature Be Your Medicine

Neil Baldwin

Grey-Bruce is like a quilt of natural areas, farms, and settlements, all in close proximity to each other. Unlike city folks, we don't have to go far to connect with nature. Though sometimes we can overlook what is on our own doorstep – I know I am guilty of visiting the beautiful Bruce Peninsula less since moving here seven years ago – and yet what is truly amazing about these natural areas is that they offer immense benefits to mind, body and soul.

As a professional Counsellor for 20 years, and an outdoors enthusiast for almost as long, I have a bias in favour of nature's role in bolstering our resilience. But scientific studies are showing how natural areas, particularly those populated by trees, offer a broad range of benefits including improved mood, better sleep, lowered stress and even enhanced immune system. It was the Japanese who pioneered the concept of *shinrin-yoku* (literally "forest bathing") based on the common-sense assumption that getting humans – who did, after all, evolve from a species which habituated in natural settings – reconnected with nature would be a healthy thing. It is, of course, a good thing, which is why we usually feel better after a walk in the wilds. Now we are coming to better understand just how good it is for us, and why. In addition to the pleasing sight of trees and plants, studies hint we may be predisposed to a soothing psychological effect of being surrounded by earth- and green-tones. There is surely a beneficial physiological effect to being in the company of trees, all of which

respire oxygen into the environment.

Recent studies have also looked at how phytoncides – antimicrobial organic compounds found in the essential oils which pervade the forest environment – can enhance immune reaction. In addition to the oils, we also inhale beneficial bacteria and negatively-charged ions when in woodlands. *Shinrin-yoku* is now entering the mainstream North American consciousness. Under the guise of "nature therapy", "forest bathing", and related terms, the practice merges spending time in treed natural areas with elements of mindfulness practice to derive maximum benefit. It's meant to be forest *bathing*, not a quick shower, so the more intentionally, leisurely and gently the time is spent the better.

Web search this topic and numerous studies and reports substantiate the benefits of time in treed natural areas. Some even go so far as to conclude more effectiveness than drug therapy in mildly depressive patients. The point is that it is not merely a case of "feeling" more content after time in nature. There is a growing body of evidence corroborating it with actual mental and physical interactions. An inferential conclusion of the studies is also to show that while some parks have an obvious function – like when there is a particular natural feature or sports purpose – ALL parklands and natural areas have an immense and vital function: they provide wellness benefits, big or small, direct and indirect, to all who visit.  $\Omega$

## Welbeck Sawmill Ltd.

Come see us ... we're worth the trip!



Beams and Timbers,  
Logging Tools, Veneers,  
Woodworking Machinery,  
Carpenters & Cabinetmakers'  
Tools, Stoves, Books,  
Ambient Air Cleaners,  
Canoe Supplies

**Beside the Mill is one of  
Canada's most unique stores.**

A fascinating place to shop for the  
woodworking tools, hard to find  
hardware items and exotic woods.



**519-369-2144**

Welbeck Sawmill Ltd.  
522598 Welbeck Rd.  
R.R.#2 Durham, ON N0G 1R0

[www.welbecksawmill.com](http://www.welbecksawmill.com)

### LOCATION:

7.5 miles north of Durham  
and 2 miles west of Hwy #6

### OPEN:

Mon. - Fri. 8 am - 6 pm  
Sat, 8 am - 4 pm



## HARBOUR NIGHTS Concert Series

### 15th Anniversary Season!

**JUNE 19** Afternoon Anniversary Show at 1 PM  
Summerfolk Youth Discoveries & more!  
Evening show: Morgan Davis

**JUNE 26** The Marigolds – Caitlin Hanford,  
Gwen Swick & Suzie Vinnick

**JULY 3** The Soles

Concerts continue weekly  
to August 14

### CONCERTS 7 PM

1155 1st Ave. West, Owen Sound  
Free Admission – Donations Welcome  
Bring your own lawn chair

[harbournights.ca](http://harbournights.ca)



Morgan Davis

**92.3**  
*The Dock*  
Greatest Hits

**owen  
sound**  
where you want to live