

# River-Lations – Hour Glasses and Hiking Trails

By Patty Mondore

I've heard about the significance of the Frontenac Arch for almost as long as I've heard about the 1000 Islands, and just about every time I hear it being mentioned, I pretty much tune out. That's one reason I didn't name this article "Understanding the Frontenac Arch." I'm guessing most of you wouldn't have read it. I know I wouldn't have.

To be honest, I just don't get it. Something about how the glaciers formed the 1000 Islands (Ok, I get that), but what the Frontenac Arch has to do with that has evaded me for...well...for as long as I've heard of it. When we got a newsletter from the Thousand Islands Land Trust (TILT) and I saw that the front page article was about the Frontenac Arch, I was about to skip over it and find something (anything) more interesting and understandable, like new hiking trails, etc. But then I happened to notice that the author (Spencer Busler, assistant director) wrote that the Frontenac Axis (or Arch) "can be somewhat challenging to conceptualize while at ground level." He had my attention, especially since I spend the majority of my life at ground level. Perhaps knowing that some of us out here do struggle with the concept, I figured maybe he would be sympathetic and break it up into

layperson terms. So, I took a deep breath and gave it one more attempt to understand.

The article started by describing the Frontenac Arch (FA) as an ancient hourglass. Indeed, the satellite picture of the area being described is the shape of an hourglass that runs from the Adirondacks in New York to the Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario. It is comprised of a densely forested granite rocky ridge that widens on either side but forms the narrow hourglass center as it crosses through the Saint Lawrence River Valley area (which includes all of the 1000 Islands). The entire area was once covered by a sheet of ice over a mile thick. When the glaciers retreated (around 13,000 years ago), they formed the forests, streams, wetlands, river and islands that we see (and enjoy so much) today.

The author wrote that "we owe a great deal of appreciation for the landforms and ecosystems left behind to these receding glaciers." I couldn't agree more. I don't think I could spend a day at the river without feeling an overwhelming sense of awe. The article goes on to explain how these landforms serve as one of the most important wildlife migration corridors on the continent. They are also responsible for making both the 1000 Islands and Lake Ontario. And the islands

of the FA act as a giant natural dam holding back the deep waters of Lake Ontario. So, that narrow section of the hourglass has become a natural corridor through which a great number of the area's wildlife passes and migrates. Hence, the corridor that runs from one end of the FA, from Algonquin to the Adirondacks, has appropriately become known as the A2A corridor.

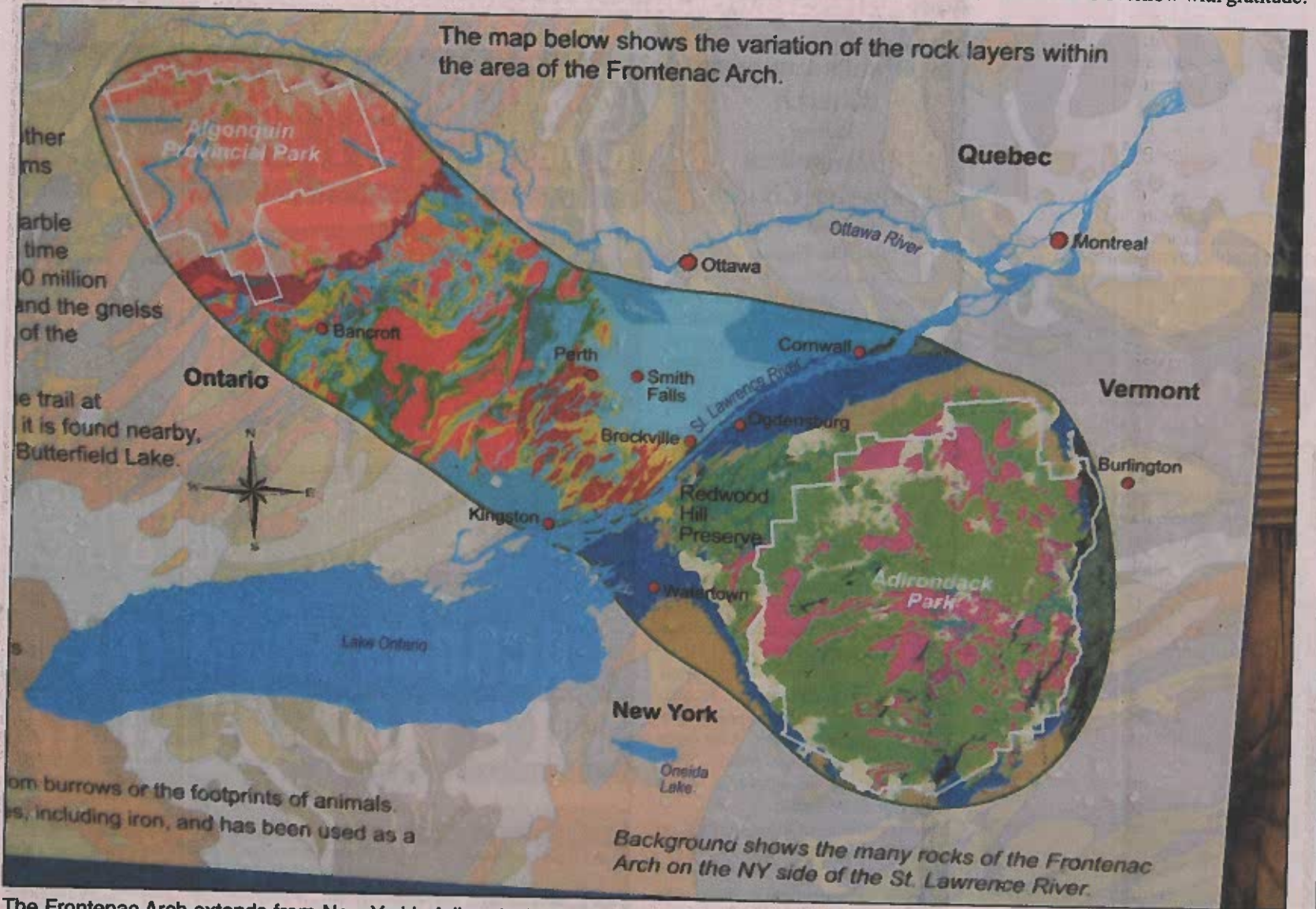
As I was looking up info on the A2A corridor, I came across an international organization called the A2A Collaborative. They referred to the Frontenac Arch as home to a vast array of plants and animals and that "it is one of the last large-scale, intact forest and wetland linkages left in Eastern North America. It provides the best remaining potential for wildlife movement across the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence system." Their dream is "a resilient, ecologically connected A2A region that sustains a full range of native wildlife and enhances people's quality of life for generations to come."

Since the narrowest point in the corridor has become one of the most populous stretches of the 1000 Islands, that is why preserves and land trusts like TILT are so important in keeping the "conservation bridge" open for our wildlife friends. Of course,

a side benefit is all of the nature trails available to us humans. As the TILT article concludes, "What better way to express our gratitude and appreciation for these natural wonders than to provide them with perpetual protection?"

I couldn't agree more. Gratitude expressed through protection. And thinking about it, we have actually been given a mandate to do just that for all of creation from the one who made it. In fact, that mandate goes back to the very beginning where, in the very first garden, the very first man and woman were told to watch over and care for that indescribably beautiful garden and all of its creatures. I think the gratitude part comes almost naturally when we find ourselves overcome by the wonder and beauty we find all around us. A psalmist puts it: "We give thanks to you O God. Our souls are overflowing with thanks! Your name is near; Your people remember and tell of Your marvelous works and wonders" (Psalm 75:1).

I don't want to get carried away, but I do think I can honestly say I have a better understanding of the Frontenac Arch and the A2A corridor. And, of course, as we hike along some of those exquisitely beautiful hiking trails, I will continue to overflow with gratitude.



The Frontenac Arch extends from New York's Adirondack Mountains to the Algonquin Provincial Park in Ontario, Canada, and is a natural wildlife passageway.

Patty Mondore photo