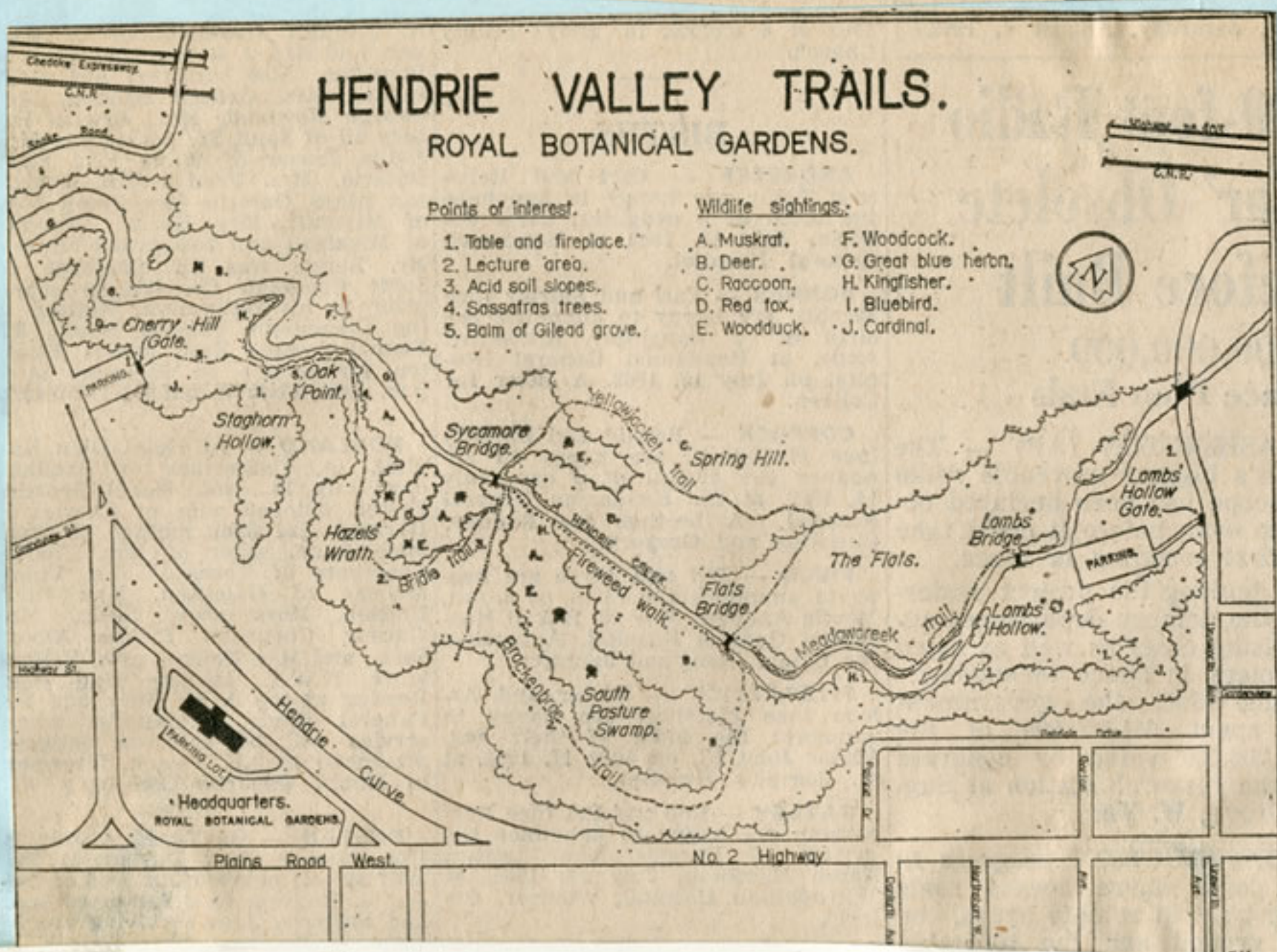


A trail through the valley...



By **JOHN McMENEMY**

Spectator Staff

THEY may have been interested in sassafras albidum and populus balsamifera. Perhaps such names as Staghorn Hollow, Hazel's Wrath and The Flats attracted their interest. Or else it could simply have been a preference for sun and fresh air over urban smog and noise.

Whatever the reason, more than 1,600 people were counted at a checkpoint in Hendrie Valley one day last fall and Royal Botanical Gardens officials are not expecting anything different this summer.

Preparing for the expected public attention during the coming months, Bridle Trail in Hendrie Valley has been chosen as the first trail in the Gardens to have a printed guide available to the public.

LARGE NUMBERED markers have been set out along the trail and the selections on the guide sheets, available at Cherry Hill Gate, deal with special features of natural history at each marker.

Out of sight of those travelling Highway 2, the valley lies on the Waterdown side of the highway and runs from the lower end of the Mausoleum Curve, where there is a parking area to Unsworth Avenue, Aldershot.

The valley is traversed with

a network of old coach roads which bear testimony of former days when the Valley Farm was a famed home of thoroughbreds.

These same roads have formed the basis for the system of nature trails which have been developed there.

BRIDLE TRAIL is one of four trails and a walk in Hendrie Valley, a gift to the public from the Hendrie estate and the Ontario department of highways.

The other trails in the valley are Yellowjacket Trail, Brackenbrae Trail, Meadowcreek Trail and Fireweed Walk.

In 1931, George Muir Hendrie made the presentation of Hendrie Valley, comprising 122 acres, to the citizens of Hamilton for use as recreational land. Ten years later, the land was designated in the province's Gardens' Act as part of the embryonic Royal Botanical Gardens.

One year after that, a gift of land from the provincial department of highways boosted the valley to its present size and placed it alongside Highway 2. The department's gift is the site of the Gardens' headquarters building and Cherry Hill Gate.

Since 1954 the valley has been subject to a continuous development program aimed at education and recreation.

The old coach roads were restored not for horses this time, but for hikers.

TREE LABELS and trail-side posters were put up, lectures and guided tours organized, picnic facilities laid out.

The names given to the different areas in the valley refer to some peculiar aspect of the area.

Hazel's Wrath is a reminder of Hurricane Hazel which whirled northward in 1954 and uprooted many red oaks in the valley. Staghorn Hollow got its name from staghorn sumac which is abundant in the bowl.

Other names such as Lamb's Hollow, The Flats and South Pasture Swamp are area names which refer back to the Hendrie era.

Spring Hill has a number of active springs on its slopes which were boxed in once and used as a water supply by residents in the area. At Sycamore Bridge, a number of sycamore trees have been planted as a replacement for American elms which died and had to be cut down.

THE MOST common trees in the valley are oaks and willows, but along the Bridle Trail a group of sassafras and balsam poplars with historic significance can be found.

Both the sassafras and balsam poplars, known scientifically as sassafras albidum and populus balsamifera, are aromatic trees used by early settlers for medicinal purposes and perfume.

The oil found in the sassafras poplars is used in perfumes, soaps, candies and chewing gum. The balsam poplars are more commonly known to farmers and westerners as the balm-of-Gilead.

Hendrie Valley, with its ponds, mown turf and swamp, all linked and made accessible by trails, is a natural area full of contrasts and sights and sounds that make a refreshing change from concrete and exhaust fumes.



Mary Murray
1951.

*9. My beloved
mother in law,
with warm regards
Sincerely yr
Elizabeth A. Hendrie*