

Lifestyles

Hiker Mike likes to walk his troubles away

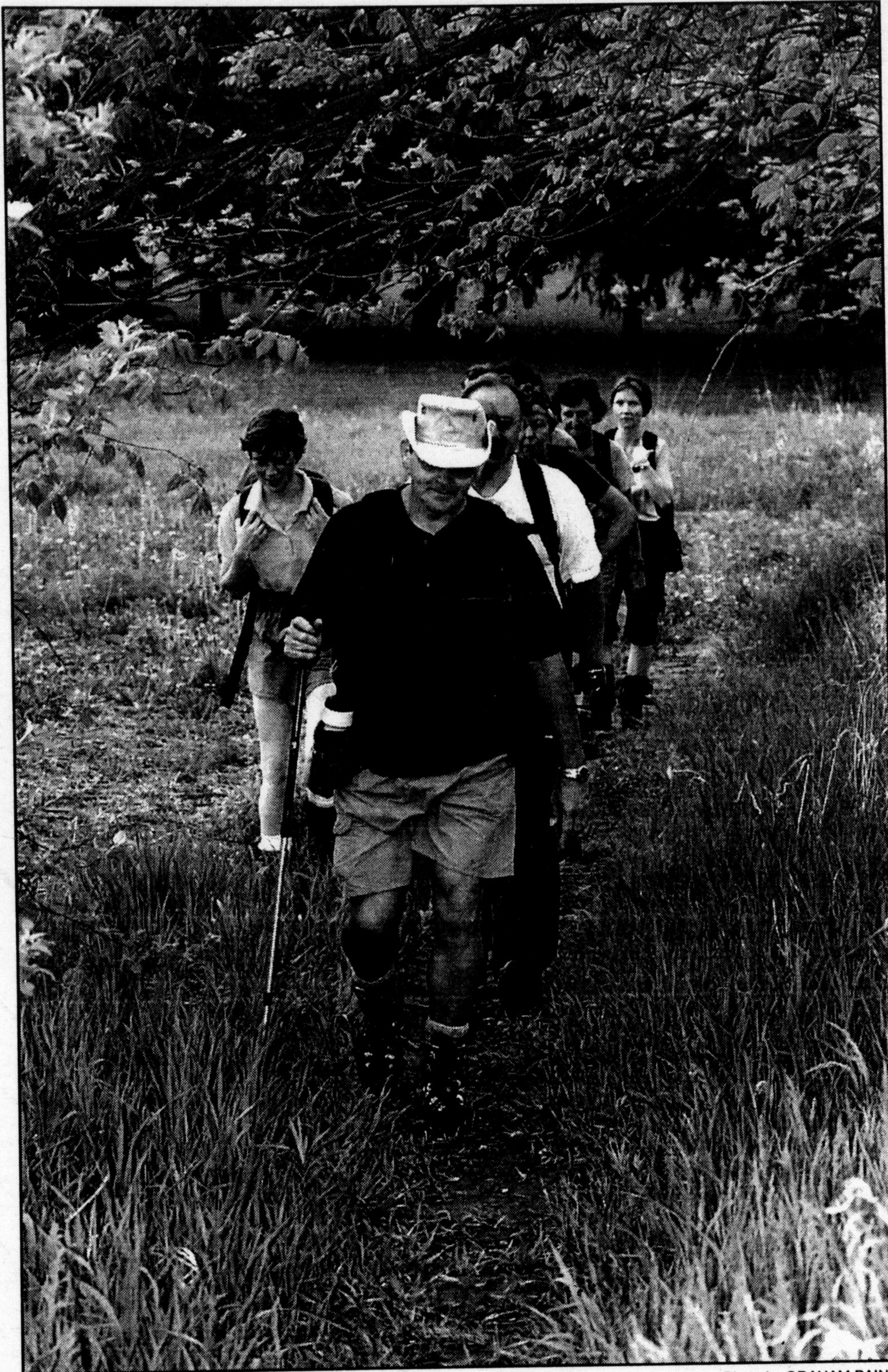


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

A group of hikers enjoy a weekend trek along the rear of Kelso Conservation Area, one of the locations featured in author Mike Kirby's new book *Hiker Mike's Best Hikes: The Megacity and Beyond*.

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

Might as well just surrender quietly, Milton, because it looks as though the jig is up.

If residents thought they were going to get away with keeping the magnificent trail system that bedecks the Niagara Escarpment a secret from the marauding hordes out there, they've got another think coming.

They've been busted by the good intentions of Hiker Mike.

See, when Hiker Mike gets to talking about his great passion for outdoor walking, one can all but see the pom-poms waving and hear the band marching in the background.

But if he's all rah-rah sis-boom-bah about the thing, it's because there's no question Hiker Mike, AKA Mike Kirby, loves his job.

And the former Milton resident who now makes his living delivering trail reports on CFRB radio and Home and Garden Television also has a soft spot for this part of the world, where terrific trails lace the escarpment like gently gleaming, hidden jewels. At least they were hidden, before he ratted them out.

Milton isn't spotlighted in his book, *Hiker Mike's Best Hikes: The Megacity and Beyond*. But it isn't exactly overlooked either.

And no wonder, since Milton boasts one of the greatest natural areas in the world.

"I like going in the back way of Hilton Falls," said Mr. Kirby. "You can walk the ridge of the escarpment. It's 12 miles of the greatest damn hike you can get, because it's all downhill."

Getting back is a different story, though, and Mr. Kirby avoids it by having his wife meet him in Campbellville for lunch.

Familiar stomping grounds, as it happens. "I lived out on the escarpment there," he said. "I love it. I love Milton."

Today, the energetic, practically effervescent Mr. Kirby loves all kinds of things, with hiking being up near the top.

But that wasn't always the case. At one time, Mr. Kirby loved booze more than most things. But some 15 years ago, he dried out for good and earned a whole new lease on life.

"I sobered up at 40," he said. "I didn't know life could be so full."

Now married with a house full of kids, a thriving career and more energy than the former Ontario Hydro, Mr. Kirby is filled to busting with the zeal of a preacher.

"I'm a bit of a cheerleader for it," he said



Former Milton resident Mike Kirby, AKA CFRB's Hiker Mike, has touted Milton as a great place to hike in his book.

shamelessly. "I can walk 25 miles a day and I won't be sore in the morning. And if I walk two hours a day, I can eat any damn thing I want."

He adds this because the ever-expanding Canadian waistline is a concern he feels hiking can address.

In other words, do it often and long enough, and no one will need to push themselves away from the buffet table before they're good and ready.

As for Hiker Mike, he walks at least 90 minutes a day and is a fighting fit 55 years old. For his 60th birthday, he's planning to take himself and two lucky CFRB winners to hike Mount Everest.

When he does, it will be his third time making the trek. He touts the emotional benefits of hiking as well.

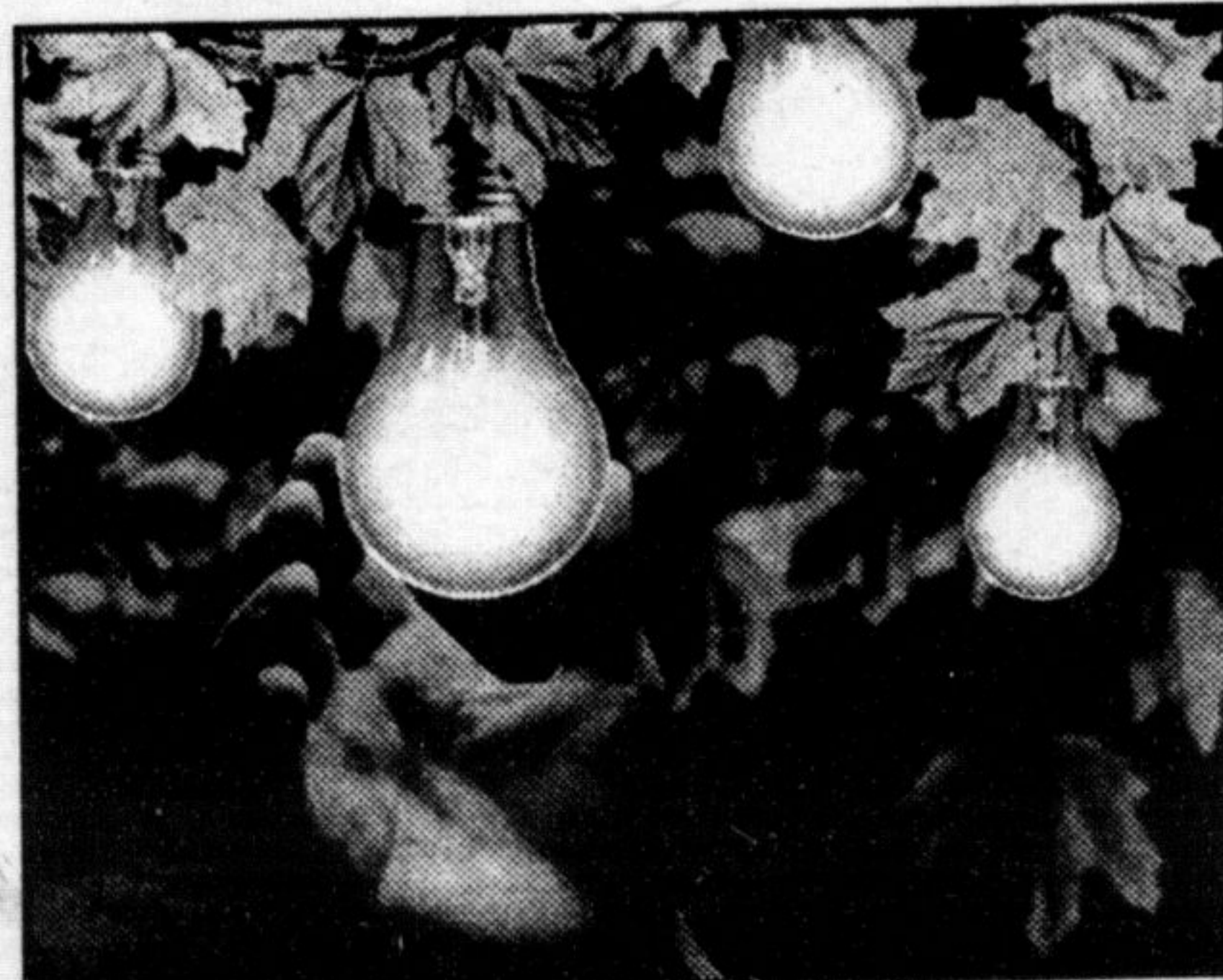
"I can take my troubles for a walk or a hike," said Mr. Kirby. "I take my problems out there and come back with a solution."

No wonder, then, this hiking thing is really taking off. "It's booming," he said. "People are beginning to realize walking is not rocket science. It's putting one foot in front of the other."

And it's accessible, thanks in part to Mr. Kirby's book. It details the start and end points of a myriad of trails all across the GTA, with handy icons to show their level of difficulty. Some trails are simple enough to take children along. Others are meant for harder souls, those he has nicknamed guerrilla hikers.

"They might get a topographical map of an area," he said. "They'll find a creek and follow it to its source."

Copies of Mr. Kirby's book can be found at Indigo, Chapters and Book City, or order directly by calling 1-800-565-3111.



QUESTIONS ABOUT PICKING YOUR ELECTRICITY RETAILER?

Now you have the power to choose your electricity from a number of companies.

CALL 1-888-668-4636

and receive a free, 12-page brochure.

Visit our website at www.est.gov.on.ca or Email: fyi@est.gov.on.ca

 Ontario