

[Page 51 - John Erskine: 'Under the Forest'](#)ISSUE : [Issue 33](#)

Published by Ronald Caplan on 1983/6/1

spring-beauty blossoms white among drab dead leaves, and the Dutchman's-breeches hangs out its creamy washing at the foot of grey trees. Three-leaved toothwort, looking more like a rose than a mustard, opens its four white petals. In rich woods the wild onion throws up its fleshy leaves, and in wet places Jack rises to preach under the green-and-white striped hood of his pulpit. For a few days patches of woodland are gay with the spotted leaves and yellow lilies of the dogtooth violet, until June comes and they vanish, leaving no trace. In the marshy woods of the south-west the skunk-cabbage flowers, putting up its single dingy spathe which changes to a lump of hard seeds and withers away before the first broad leaf appears. All these flowers exploit the May sunshine and store their year's supplies, often in fleshy roots protected, as in the onion, by a repulsive smell, or, as in Jack-in-the-pulpit, by spiny crystals which penetrate the tongue of one who tastes them. Other plants have learned to tolerate the shade and manage to flourish through the summer--creeping twin-flower with its paired trumpets, white-flowered partridge-berry and blue-flowered speedwell, erect false lily-of-the-valley, and starflower. Everywhere rise the large divided leaves of wild sarsaparilla with balls of creamy white flowers or heads of blue-black berries. It is almost unusual to see a complete plant of sarsaparilla in the woods, for this is a favourite food of the deer. Adaptations Other plants have developed, like the bog-plants, a partnership with root-fungi which break down dead leaves and from them make food for themselves and for their hosts. Even under barren spruce forest we find the lovely wax-flower and all the species of shinleaf with their racemes of white or pink bells. With them grow the blueberries, small and low except in the southwest where they are joined by the jumble of types that we call "high-bush blue-berries"--some bushes eight feet tall, others low or even creeping; some with fruit black and clustered, others with berries blue and single. All of these thrive in the open, but, thanks to their root-fungi, they can tolerate shade also. Yet other plants have gone farther and now are bound to the forest. In spring you may find under the evergreens slender yellowish shoots about six inches high, bearing a few tiny orchid-flowers but no leaves. Six weeks later other larger flowering plants appear, whitish with a flush of yellow or maroon and carrying many spotted orchid-flowers. If you dig down into the duff beneath them, you will find a conical knobby root which gives these orchids their name of "coral-root." They have abandoned leaves altogether and have become saprophytic, depending for their food upon the activity of their root-fungi. In July the white stems of Indian-pipes and the yellow of pinesap thrust up through the duff. These near relatives of the wax-flower have wholly abandoned leaves and feed, like coral-root, upon the dead leaves of the forest from which they can no longer be separated. Parasites Another group of plants has chosen a different way of life leading to the same dependence on environment. In spring one sometimes finds under the trees pale leafless stalks each with a large white snapdragon flower. These are broom-rape, and the plants of this family are parasites upon the roots of one plant or another. This



white-flowered broom-rape has many hosts and wanders out among the scrub, but the others are limited each to a single tree. One lives on the roots of oaks, but though it is said to be common in the LaHave Valley and occasionally elsewhere, I have never found it. The other is common enough under beech woods in September--nine-inch shoots blossoming faintly purple. These

PIPER'S TRAILER COURT Featuring: Fully Licensed Dining Room * Guest House * Swimming Pool Ocean-Side Campsites * Laundromat * Mini-Mart

Indian Brook on the Cabot Trail
Halfway Between Baddeck and Ingonish
R B. MacNeil Ltd. MERCEDES-BENZ & LADA SALES and SERVICE 36 State St., Sydney, N. S. BIP 2W4
NOW YOU CAN'T AFFORD NOT TO TAKE A LOOK! X
564-LADA 5232 WE MEET THE CHALLENGE! S; Cape Breton Offshore Fabricators Limited • C80F is the only shop in Canada, and is one of only two or three in North America that manufactures hydraulic roof supports for longwall mining. Our roof supports, fabricated under license from Hemscheidt Germany, are capable of supporting 400 tons via twin large diameter hydraulic cylinders. Additional separately actuated hydraulics move the support with the advancing coal face, alter the angle of the roof canopy, move outside protectors, and so on. Sydport Industrial Park P. O. Box 1644, Sydney, N. S. BIP 6T7 Phone: (902) 564-5461 Telex No. 019-35296 ALL TYPES OF HEAVY STEEL FABRICATION CBOF, a N.S. company employing over 60 workers