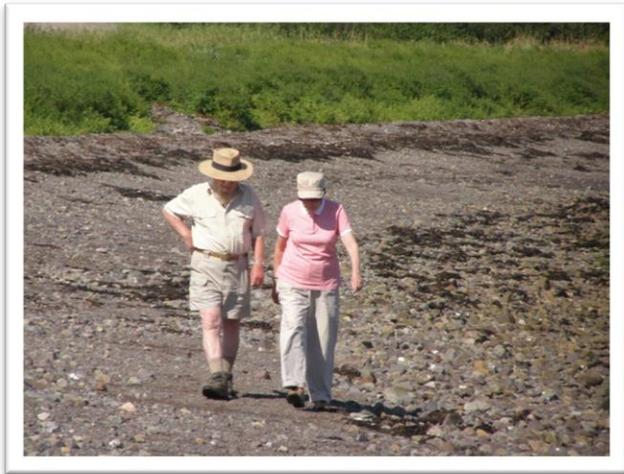


Goodbye Farley

It is with great sadness and a big empty place in my heart that I reflect on the passing of Farley Mowat. Farley was no doubt a Canadian icon – as a writer, an activist and an environmental thinker and philosopher. He was a true champion of the natural world, spending almost his entire life learning about nature, loving it, writing about it and doing his damndest to speak out and protect it. He was also an inspiration to so many people, young and old, around the world.



How I knew Farley best though, was as a wonderful friend to the Nature Trust, to me, and to nature. I had the good fortune of getting to know him when he chose our organization to partner in protecting his treasured coastal paradise in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. What an incredible boost it was to our confidence as a young conservation organization to have Farley Mowat seek us out, and put his faith and trust in us. It reassured us that we were on the right path and that our conservation efforts mattered.



The first encounter I had with Farley was a day about a decade ago, when out of the blue, he called my home. A grumbly voice muttered, “This is Farley Mowat speaking and I want to protect my land.” I don’t recall my exact response (after a long, stunned silence), but I had of course

concluded it must be a joke. But it really was Farley Mowat, and after a good chuckle and ribbing at my expense, he said he’d just discovered the Nature Trust and loved what he’d heard. He proceeded to say, “I’ve been looking for you for decades.”



It turns out that many years ago Farley had an idea—a land conservation idea. He envisioned an effort, right across the country, creating oases of nature, protected areas on private lands that could serve as refuges for nature on what he felt would no doubt be an increasingly “pillaged and damaged” planet.

He created a group called the Mowat

Environmental Institute to try to bring this vision to fruition and began by thinking about his own land in Cape Breton as its first protected oasis. That land meant the world to him, a place he affectionately called, “Farley’s Ark.” It was here where he could escape from his busy life in Ontario, and live in nature with the love of his life, Claire (and Chester the dog too!). It was a place where he wrote many of his books, finding inspiration and peace in the woods and along the shores. And a place where nature could thrive. He realized one day though that he might not live forever, and who’d be there to look after his oasis then? That search for the future steward of his land is what led him eventually to the Nature Trust.

In 2006 he entrusted his 200 acre coastal property to our care and stewardship, through a generous donation of the land. He once told me that among all the things he’d done in his life, he was particularly proud of protecting his land—one of the few really tangible, lasting ways that people can really do something for the environment. He called it his green legacy. Of course his environmental legacy is much, much more than one gift of land—but it was touching for me to hear that it meant so much to him. And what a privilege it has been for me, and for all of us at the Nature Trust, to have been even a tiny part of the larger legacy that Farley has left for the planet.



One of my very favourite memories with Farley is the two of us standing on top of the hill overlooking his farmhouse and the ocean and the beautiful “Farley’s Ark” property. He smiled, put his arm around my shoulder and said proudly, “We did it, kid. We really did it!” A moment I’ll never forget.

Despite my sadness, I can’t help but smile when I think of Farley. Over the years that I had the privilege of getting to know him, I discovered that inside that gruff exterior was a wonderfully funny, ceaselessly charming, and deeply caring man, a softie really. Sure, he could rant and rage and ruffle feathers like no other, but I think that was just the side of him he used to provoke and prod and get his messages heard. And sure he could paint the darkest pictures of the planets’ future thanks to what us “idiotic humans were up to,” but deep inside, I believe he actually had hope. For the planet and for people too. And he has passed on not just his passion for nature—but his hope—to me, and no doubt to countless other people who were touched by him or by his writing.



Farewell, Farley, and thank you, for all you have given to us, for all you did to protect the planet and your many webbed and winged friends, and for inspiring us all to carry on in your footsteps.

Bonnie Sutherland

Executive Director, Nova Scotia Nature Trust

