



VTA NEWS

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*Lyda Bay Lookout on the Casque Isles section.
Photo by Daniela Carlino.*

Ruminations From the President

A trail is a trail, right? One VTA Club is the same as another, right? The answer to these questions is, yes and no! Please allow me to explain myself.

There are six Clubs that maintain over 500 km of trails from Blind River to Nipigon within the Association. In my second year of being the President of the VTA, I have come to realize that each Club has their differences in trail management, and each Club has their own challenges as well.

There are different types of forest within the VTA, and that leads to different marking schemes amongst the Clubs. When you are hiking on a trail on the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail (G7) trails, you can easily identify the trail path within the spruce and brush that is prominent in the area. Likely the trail is the only discernible path, so minimal markers are required as you can see the twists and turns. Over on the Penewobikong section near Blind River, the deciduous forests have large open spaces between them. There, a marking system such as is used on the Bruce Trails is needed to show which direction the path turns. On the Casque Isles and G7 trails, marking a path on the shore of Lake Superior presents a whole different challenge. There must be some consideration given to those who use the Trans Canada Water Trail, as painted markers on the shore can resemble graffiti. Physical markers, like posts or rock cairns are used, or painted marks are strategically placed so they can be seen only from the trail and not from a boater passing by.

There are similarities between trails as well. The Robertson Cliffs trails at the Algoma Highlands Conservancy in the SSM area and the Mazukama Falls trail in the Nor'Westers section

near Nipigon are both well-known local trails and are promoted through social media. Because of the popularity of these trails, litter is an issue and it can be challenging to keep hikers on the correct paths. So, while one Club strives to promote places along their trails, their plans are tempered by the experience of other Clubs where some places have become too popular.

As for Club management, most Clubs are run by volunteers. The exception is the G7 Club, which is a municipally-run organization. A few of the Clubs have a very small contingent of volunteers, while others can call on a larger group for help when needed. The Sauteaux Club manages just over 200 km of trails from Harmony Bay in the west to Thessalon in the east, presenting a challenge to keep these trails clear and usable. The Casque Isles Club maintains about 60 km of trails but can count on having 30 or more of the local 45 VTA members to come out and assist with trail activities. I will continue to ask for more volunteers to sign up with every Club, as volunteers come and go and at 59 years old, I am usually the baby of a maintenance group!

I have always enjoyed a new challenge, and being the President of the VTA surely is one of those! I have met many like-minded trail managers in this position and continue to learn from each of them. Every person that takes a position on the VTA Coordinating Council and the local Club executives helps our Association grow, and our vision of creating and maintaining high-quality trails for everyone to use continues to drive us.

So, a trail is just a trail, and I hope to see you on one this season! ■

– Matt Borutski, VTA President



View from a Robertson Cliffs Lookout, Saulteaux Section. Photo by Tiffany Runge.

Memories of the British Invasion

By Steve Dominy, Trail Maps Coordinator

Did you know that the British helped build the Stokely-Robertson Cliffs trail?

It was in the fall of 1992 and 1993 when the Saulteaux Voyageur Trail Club hosted volunteers from far and abroad to build this section of trail, between Robertson Cliffs and Harmony Bay. For two weeks each year our club hosted volunteers from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV) Programme.

The conservation strategy of the BTCV was to get people out into the wilderness working to help the environment. The organization offered 70 different “working holidays” all over the world, in most European countries and places like Iceland, Japan and Brazil.

Hike Ontario was instrumental in helping promote the BTCV partnership opportunity to its member clubs. As a result, we also welcomed members of the Bruce Trail Association and

the Hike Ontario executive as part of the entourage. Local VTA members billeted many volunteers, and the then-owner of Stokely Creek Lodge, Chuck Peterson, offered his lodge as an overnight base. The visitors worked alongside VTA local members to clear and mark 25 km of new trail.

Some members recently shared memories of that unique collaboration. Scott Capell helped Steve Taylor scout the new trail route and flag it in preparation for the visitors. Susan Graham recalls the group spontaneously breaking into song on the trail whenever a volunteer said “Let’s have a warble!” Steve Dominy billeted one volunteer, Andy, who mesmerized Steve’s two-year-old daughter with his juggling skills.

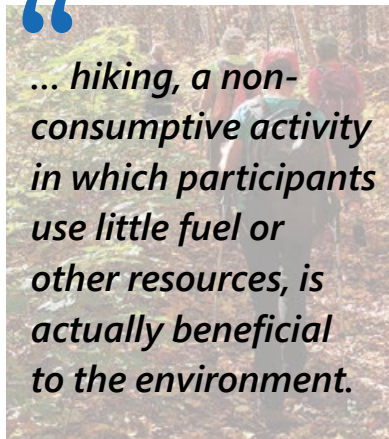
On the following page are: 1) excerpts from a *Sault Star* journalist, Angie Gallop, who spent time on the trail with the volunteers; and 2) a reprinted article from our newsletter.

(continued on page 3)

(continued from page 2)

Excerpts from the Sept. 2, 1993 Sault Star article

- Muskol bug repellent has become a best friend to seven visitors from England who have come to spend their holidays blazing trails.
- The seven members flew into Toronto over a week ago to start their working holiday at Stokely Creek. Last year, BTCV volunteers cleared the trail used this summer by Ministry of Natural Resources workers to release peregrine falcons at the cliffs of Robertson Lake along the Goulais River.
- The falcon, reported to be the world's fastest-flying bird, virtually disappeared from the Algoma region during the 1960s and '70s because of environmental poisons such as the agricultural pesticide DDT.
- For the trail blazers, vigorous work to make routes accessible is not a new task. Hiking is a very popular sport in England and ... a special legislated "right-of-way" network in [the] country allows the general public to walk on designated trails across private property.
- Steve Taylor, president of the Voyageur Trail Association, said hiking trails, which offer a quality wilderness experience, will stimulate tourism in the Algoma area. He said hiking, a non-consumptive activity in which participants use little fuel or other resources, is actually beneficial to the environment.



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The following article is reprinted from the Fall 1993 edition of the Voyageur Trail News.

British Invasion Results In New Trail

Our energetic president, Steve Taylor, was interviewed for an article which appeared in the *Sault Star* on September 2. The occasion was the arrival of 11 British Conservation Volunteers at the Stokely Creek area, where they spent two weeks clearing 25 km of trail. Here's Steve's version of the story.

One of the most interesting projects this year was the construction of a hiking trail through the Stokely property. To accomplish this task, we received help from 11 hardy individuals from the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV). I found out last year that several organizations, including this one, offer working vacations for members. With the help of Jill Leslie from Hike Ontario, and Chuck Peterson who owns Stokely, we were able to work out such a project. In most of these projects, the host club provides accommodation. In this case the accommodation was the Stokely facility itself. The task was to clear about 25 km of hiking trail.

Things were a bit hairy at first. We knew that the group was arriving in Sault Ste. Marie on Saturday August 28 via a variety of means of transportation. The problem was that nobody in the Sault knew where the meeting place was and we didn't know if the group did. Fortunately two volunteers from southern Ontario, who were with the group, had attended to this matter. We knew that one of the people attending was Richard Knot, and we found out that someone called Richard Knot was arriving on a 4:00 pm flight. We tracked him to the Water Tower Inn when a second Richard Knot arrived by road from southern Ontario. Two Richard Knots arrived in the Sault on the same day!

Twenty-two VTA members contributed to a potluck feast to welcome the group to Canada on the Sunday evening. This was an event that all seemed to enjoy. Following a great variety of food in the cosy surroundings of Stokely, I presented a brief talk on what our Association is all about and Angela, the trip leader from England, gave our members a fantastic slide show on what BTCV does. Then the work started. The BTCV volunteers and the two volunteers from southern Ontario showed considerable stamina and skill in carving the footpath out of a flagged trail through the woods. I can attest to the fact that they did a superb job of clearing the trail. Both clubs benefited from the exchange of information. They had considerable experience in the use of different tools and in water drainage.

We can only assume that they benefitted from some of our techniques. The group enjoyed beating their way through bush, which was unlike anything they had previously encountered. One of the volunteers and I spotted a bear at Tier Lake. The group did take a few days to enjoy themselves with a variety of activities including a trip to Lake Superior Provincial Park. The highlights of this seemed to be the Pictographs and the Canadian Carver Trading Post.

The result of this venture is a footpath that should be a cardinal piece of our system. The scenery along it is fantastic and includes lookouts, waterfalls, lakes, and of course, forest. It starts at the Robertson Lake Road, about 2 km past the cliffs, and comes to Highway 17 near McCauley's. It will eventually join with the rest of the trail system going North from the Sault. Several walks from the Stokely Creek Lodge are possible.

Thanks to all those who participated in the feast. Special thanks are due to Pat Capper who helped with the early chaos, Judy Falkins who helped in a number of ways, Donna Weeks for her on-trail work and transportation, Scott Capell for helping to flag the route, and Bill Robinson for his help on the arrival day. Thanks also to Hike Ontario and Jill Leslie, to Chuck Peterson for his generous accommodation, and to Todd and Leslie from southern Ontario. Finally, thanks to those who I may have forgotten. We certainly invite this enthusiastic group to return. ■

That scenic.



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Why You Should “Bathe” in The Forest

And how the Voyageur Trail can help you do it

By Elise Orlando, VTA Newsletter Editor

For the most part, I am happy to have company when I hit the trails. But sometimes, I’ll admit that I crave quiet and solitude. Times when even my headphones feel like an unwelcome distraction from what I really want to be doing – focusing on the sounds, smells, and sensations around me. Turns out, there are scientifically-proven health benefits to doing this (who knew!)

I discovered forest bathing a few months ago, after stumbling across an NPR (National Public Radio) podcast feature. While the concept of spending time in nature as a form of therapy isn’t new, this specific term gained traction in Japan in the 1980s, as a remedy for stress-related illnesses (in Japan, the practice is known as *shinrin-yoku*).

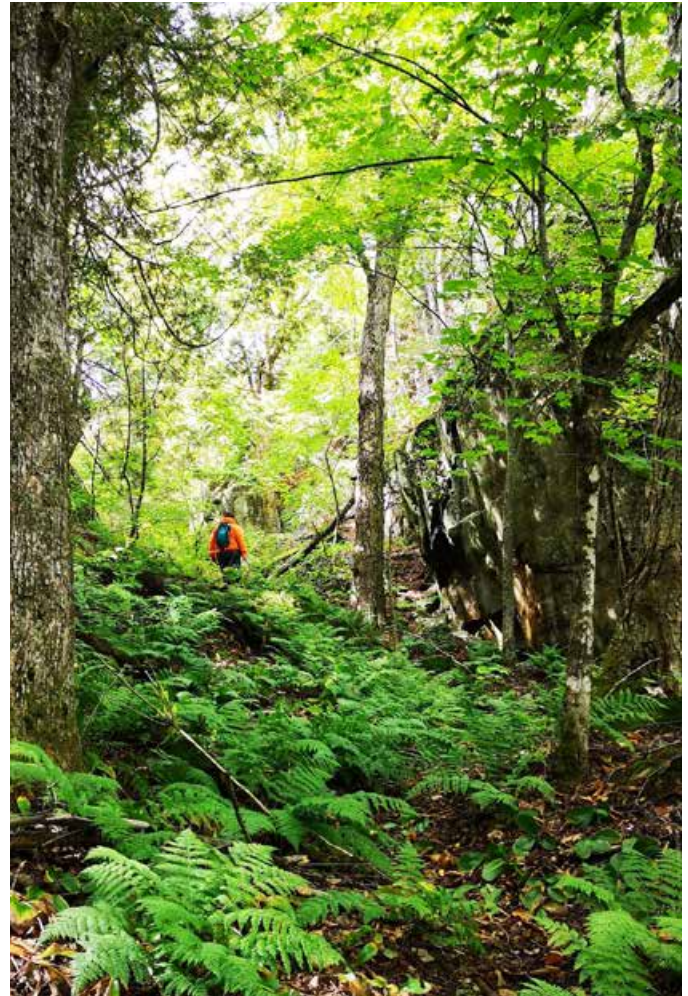
The podcast outlined that forest bathing is ultimately about connecting with our senses, while being out in nature. Not only because it’s inherently enjoyable, but because there are numerous benefits you can reap – like lower blood pressure, decreased anxiety, and even an immune system boost, to name a few.

The benefits are linked to the chemicals, called phytoncides, that trees release into the air. Research even demonstrated that a walk in the forest, as opposed to a walk in a laboratory setting, led to participants having decreased cortisol levels* (a hormone that is elevated by stress, and linked to concerns like high blood pressure or headaches).

Forest bathing is technically different from hiking, since the idea is to have a low heart rate, and move slowly. But incorporating sessions into your hikes is a great idea. The Voyageur Trail offers plenty of flat, peaceful terrain where you can give forest bathing a shot. I’ve always liked areas like Pebble Beach (Group of Seven Section) for this type of thing. It’s easy to pause, and mindfully absorb everything your forested backdrop has to offer you.

If you’re wondering how, specifically, to go about “bathing” in the forest, the great news is that it’s incredibly simple. On your next hike, take a break and find a comfortable seat on the ground, or on a rock (as comfortable as rocks can be). Try to minimize distractions, like music or cell phones, and focus on the spectacular scenery that surrounds you.

NPR points out that a basic breathing exercise can be an effective way to kick start your practice. Slowly inhale for a count of two or three seconds – whatever feels natural for you – and then exhale, slowly, for double the amount of time as the inhale. Try to tune into your senses as much as possible – can you feel a breeze moving across your cheeks? How does



VTA Trail between Iron Bridge and Warnock Lake, Penewobikong Section.

the ground feel beneath your feet? What can you smell, hear, and see?

One of my favourite sayings is that “it’s not the destination, it’s the journey.” So the next time you’re on a hike, challenge yourself, as suggested in this Ontario Parks [blog](#), to try walking into the woods to simply enjoy the experience, instead of some of the other typical goals we might have (hitting a certain number of kilometres, a time record, or snapping a perfect photo for social media). Slow down, open your mind, and let those magical phytoncides do their work! ■

*References & further reading:

- [Harvard Medical School – Can forest therapy enhance health and well-being?](#)
- [Ontario Parks.ca – Healing in the forest: a guide to forest bathing](#)
- [NPR – Spending time in a forest can boost health and lower stress. Here’s how.](#)
- [National Geographic – The secret to mindful travel? A walk in the woods](#)



VTA President Matt Borutski with Susan Graham, the 2024 Steve Taylor Volunteer Award recipient.

Steve Taylor Volunteer of the Year Award

Susan Graham is this year's recipient

The Saulteaux Club was proud to nominate Susan for this year's Steve Taylor Volunteer Award.

Susan's active efforts over the last thirty-seven years have not gone unnoticed. Since the early 1990s, she has played a pivotal role in keeping the Saulteaux Section active and organized, serving as Club President and Treasurer over the years. In addition, at the Association level, Susan held the positions of Vice-President (Central) and Membership Secretary.

Susan has spent countless hours planning dinners, keeping financials on track, and still makes the time to lead hikes in between. The VTA is grateful to have committed and passionate members like Susan, who take initiative and prioritize the trail and its members.

Susan knew Steve Taylor personally and is touched to receive the award. Congratulations, Susan, on this highly-deserved recognition. ■

Sponsor SHOUT OUT

A huge thank you goes to these 12 community-minded sponsors who stepped up to sponsor our updated 2024 trail map products. Such contributions allow us to provide the highest-quality map products for the enjoyment and safety of our members. Please support and tell your family and friends about these companies, associations and communities.

We would like to acknowledge the committee that helped us canvas for sponsors this year: Tracey Pinder, Teresa Belanger, Steve Hopkin, Donna Ryckman-Rooney, Andy Stevens, Ryan MacDonnell, Ursula Schleen, Mark Crofts, Matt Borutski and Steve Dominy. An immense thank you goes to these dedicated members. ■

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McCauley's Havilland Bay	Harmony Bay/Sault Ste. Marie	Trail Supporter
Township of Terrace Bay	Terrace Bay	Trail Supporter



VTA Gear Review *With Mark Crofts*

Zippers that don't zip, wear points that thin too quickly, and "draw" strings that don't actually draw ... these are just some of the irksome properties of most foreign-made modern day packs and fanny packs. On top of this, consider the fact that every stitch of material will last forever.

My go-to day pack is a Deuter 60L. It has served me well, but I don't expect it to last forever. My last Deuter pack was retired after about 15 years. An impressive life span. But – what then? Probably destined for the dump, where it will languish in the trash pile for eternity.


It's time to consider brands like Frost River (www.frostriver.com). I've purchased a few pieces of their gear, which is made in Duluth, Minnesota, USA. So far, so good: the draw strings draw, the zippers zip, no wear points have worn through. The best part? If and when I decide to retire the gear, it is 99 per cent biodegradable, since Frost River uses waxed canvas, leather and brass.

The quality admittedly comes at a steeper price. The "Back Bay Lumbar Pack", for example, sells for \$250.00 (USD) at time of writing. That being said, it is a very robust fanny pack, with two bottle holders, two gear compartments, and lots of space.


Luckily, there are Frost River product distributors in Ontario:

- Canadian Outdoor Equipment: www.canadianoutdoorequipment.com/frost-river-packs.html
- Trailhead Paddle Shack: www.trailheadpaddleshack.ca/

Both websites are worth a look, offering selection that you can't find anywhere else. ■



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Trail Users' Code:

- Hike only along marked routes. Do not take short cuts.
- Do not climb fences.
- Carry out all garbage (if you carry it in, you can carry it out).
- Light cooking fires at official campsites only. Drench fires after use (or better still, carry a lightweight stove).
- Leave flowers and plants for others to enjoy.
- Do not damage live trees or strip off bark.
- Protect and do not disturb wildlife.
- Keep dogs under control (leash if necessary) and follow your club's guidelines concerning dogs.
- Respect the privacy of people living along the trail. Walk around the edges of fields, not across them.
- Leave only your thanks and take nothing but photographs.

Be a low-impact hiker!

The Voyageur Hiking Trail is a wilderness trail and some remote or little-used sections may be in poor condition due to fallen trees or regrowth of vegetation. All outdoor activities involve some degree of risk. Please, remember that your safety is your personal responsibility; be well prepared for your chosen activity and route. Use at your own risk.



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Visit our website at: www.voyageurtrail.ca

Your articles and photos are welcome! Articles may be edited due to space constraints. Submissions deadline for our Fall 2024 Newsletter is September 30, 2024.

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Or email to: info@voyageurtrail.ca

Articles in this newsletter may be copied if credit is given to the Voyageur Trail Association.

The Voyageur Trail Association is a non-profit, volunteer group dedicated to building and maintaining a public hiking trail along the northern shores of Lakes Superior and Huron, from Thunder Bay to Sudbury.

The VTA is a member of Hike Ontario and Trans Canada Trail.



VTA Photo Gallery

Show us where you've been on the Voyageur Trail!

Submit your favourite high-resolution photos with the trail location and photo credit name to info@voyageurtrail.ca.



Camping along the Casque isles Trail. Photo by Steve Coe.



Hobbit House on the Mount Gwynne Segment, Casque Isles section.



Trail in the Huron Shores section.



Full moon on the Rossport Coastal Trail by @rachsepst.

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