

ISSUE

2

Voyageur Trail Association Newsletter

Summer 2020







LETTER FROM *THE EDITOR*

It's been an unprecedented beginning to the 2020 Hiking Season, with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent closure of numerous recreation and leisure venues, including many of our partner organizations making the tough call to close their sites.

Between May 11th and 15th, 2020, we saw the reopening of Ontario Parks for day use access, with limited services available. Starting today, June 1st, 2020 Parks Canada will begin to offer limited access and services, including access to some trails, green spaces and day use areas, while maintaining physical distancing measures. On June 5th, select Parks Canada sites will also open with reduced service. As these decisions are constantly evolving, and subject to change, please be sure to follow @HikeOntario, @Ontario_Trails, @OntarioParks and @ParksCanada on social media for the most up to date province-wide information.

As with our partners, Ontario Parks and Parks Canada, the Voyageur Trail Association has made the tough decision to cancel group activities and public events until further notice.

As such, in this edition of the VTA Newsletter, we bring you a series of articles on Hiking in the era of COVID-19. These articles are aimed at providing you with the necessary knowledge and skills to participate in self-guided hiking while practicing physical distancing and recognizing that many day-use facilities remain closed to the public. They also include a reflection on trail organizations and the need for collective responsibility during COVID-19.

Lastly, with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry making changes to Ontario Regulation 665/98 (Hunting) which took effect for the 2020 Spring Bear Hunting season, which spans May 1st through June, 15th 2020 (inclusive), we bring you a Hikers Safety Advisory with tips on minimizing conflicts with hunters and black bears.

As we move into the Summer Hiking season, please be sure to follow us on social media (Instagram and Facebook) at @voyageurtrailassociation for updates on trail access, conditions and maintenance across the Voyageur Trail system, including important updates from our trail partners. Remember, we all have a role to play in ensuring that our recreation is responsible so that we can remain safe together, while apart.

Stay Safe and Happy Trails,



Kelsey Johansen

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HIKER SAFETY ADVISORY

Changes in Spring Bear Hunting Regulations



**COVER IMAGE
PIXABAY**



THE LEAVE NO TRACE SEVEN PRINCIPLES



1

PLAN AHEAD AND PREPARE

Know the regulations and special concerns for the area you'll visit. Prepare for extreme weather, hazards, and emergencies. Schedule your trip to avoid times of high use. Visit in small groups when possible. Consider splitting larger groups into smaller groups. Repackage food to minimize waste. Use a map and compass to eliminate the use of marking paint, rock cairns or flagging.

TRAVEL AND CAMP ON DURABLE SURFACES

Durable surfaces include established trails and campsites, rock, gravel, dry grasses or snow. Protect riparian areas by camping at least 200 feet from lakes and streams. Good campsites are found, not made. Altering a site is not necessary. In popular areas: Concentrate use on existing trails and campsites. Walk single file in the middle of the trail, even when wet or muddy. Keep campsites small. Focus activity in areas where vegetation is absent. In pristine areas: Disperse use to prevent the creation of campsites and trails. Avoid places where impacts are just beginning.



2



3

DISPOSE OF WASTE PROPERLY

Pack it in, pack it out. Inspect your campsite and rest areas for trash or spilled foods. Pack out all trash, leftover food and litter. Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 200 feet from water, camp and trails. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished. Pack out toilet paper and hygiene products. To wash yourself or your dishes, carry water 200 feet away from streams or lakes and use small amounts of biodegradable soap. Scatter strained dishwater.

LEAVE WHAT YOU FIND

Preserve the past: examine, but do not touch cultural or historic structures and artifacts. Leave rocks, plants and other natural objects as you find them. Avoid introducing or transporting non-native species. Do not build structures, furniture, or dig trenches.



4



5

MINIMIZE CAMPFIRE IMPACTS

Campfires can cause lasting impacts to the backcountry. Use a lightweight stove for cooking and enjoy a candle lantern for light. Where fires are permitted, use established fire rings, fire pans, or mound fires. Keep fires small. Only use sticks from the ground that can be broken by hand. Burn all wood and coals to ash, put out campfires completely, then scatter cool ashes.

RESPECT WILDLIFE

Observe wildlife from a distance. Do not follow or approach them. Never feed animals. Feeding wildlife damages their health, alters natural behaviors, and exposes them to predators and other dangers. Protect wildlife and your food by storing rations and trash securely. Control pets at all times, or leave them at home. Avoid wildlife during sensitive times: mating, nesting, raising young, or winter.



6



7

BE CONSIDERATE OF OTHER VISITORS

Respect other visitors and protect the quality of their experience. Be courteous. Yield to other users on the trail. Step to the downhill side of the trail when encountering pack stock. Take breaks and camp away from trails and other visitors. Let nature's sounds prevail. Avoid loud voices and noises.

How to Poop in the Woods

And other Leave No Trace Considerations in the Era of COVID-19

Kelsey Johansen

We are facing a number of challenges as we enter into the 2020 Hiking Season. Not the least of which is limited access to trails and even more scarce access to visitor amenities like washrooms and handwashing stations which are currently closed at Parks Canada sites, and in some Ontario Parks and conservation areas and crown reserves due to COVID-19 safety measures.

This brings up the often-taboo subject of personal hygiene and toileting in the woods. Like other Leave No Trace (LNT) principles, hygiene practices in the woods should not be a taboo subject. This information is essential for both human and environmental health. Nonetheless, if we have learned anything from the disastrous impacts of the American government closure of 2018 on parks and protected areas, it's that people don't have the knowledge or skills to "pack in and pack out" their garbage or to use environmentally responsible hygiene and toileting practices in the absence of access to comfort stations, and pit or bush toilets.

If like me, you've spent a considerable portion of your childhood and adult life in the outdoors, chances are you've heard the phrase "Leave No Trace" or "LNT" as often as you have heard about "the Ten Essentials" (for a refresher, see *Dressing for Winter Layering for Comfort & Safety during Winter Backcountry Travel* in our Winter 2019 Edition of the VTA Newsletter). But, what does it really mean? Put simply, Leave No Trace refers to 7 Principles that we should follow to enjoy and protect our natural spaces (see detailed diagram on page 6).

In this article, we will focus on LNT Principles 1, 3 and 7 - Plan Ahead and Prepare, Dispose of Waste Properly and Be Considerate of Other Visitors, respectively. In the era of COVID-19, **Principle 1: Plan ahead and Prepare** is even more essential.

Be sure to access the social media accounts and websites of the places you plan to visit before you leave the house. Get up to date information on site openings, trail access, canine-friendly trails, parking regulations and availability of amenities like comfort stations. Having up to date information is essential to planning, and acting, accordingly. Additionally, with the Ontario Emergency Orders extended (at least) to June 9th, 2020, be sure to keep your group size to five individuals comprised of people residing at the same residence, or from within your "bubble". Plan to hike at off-peak times or days of the week to reduce encounters with other "bubbles" of trail users.

Principle 3: Dispose of Waste Properly is most often summarized by saying "pack it in, pack it out". One of the issues with this statement is its ambiguity and generality. At minimum, it refers to packing out all leftover food and litter. However, with the closure of comfort stations

this means respecting physical distancing requirements. Remember, stay one moose, three beavers or four ravens apart. To help with this, Ontario Trails has published information on Trails Etiquette and COVID-19 which can be found at: <https://www.ontariotrails.on.ca/novel-coronavirus-covid19>. Information for trail organizations, including printable signage, was released this morning by the Great Trail (formerly the Trans Canada Trail) and can be found at <https://thegreattrail.ca/national-guidelines-lignes-directrices/>.

Trail users are encouraged to travel in groups of less than 10 (comprised of their household "bubble"), to maintain their distance from individuals and other "bubbles" by avoiding group interaction, and to only engage in single file activities. This means avoiding prolonged time at congested areas like parking lots, and not gathering at trailheads, picnicking spots and scenic lookouts, to avoid contact with others.

When *passing*, trail users should step as far to the side of the trail as possible, and avoid narrow trails that make it difficult to maintain a 2-metre distance side by side. **If you cannot do this along the length of the**

"Hygiene practices in the woods should not be a taboo subject. This information is essential for both human and environmental health."

and front country waste disposal centers, this includes used / soiled human hygiene and toileting supplies, as well as dog poop.

Principle 7: Be Considerate of Other Users isn't just about being polite and sharing recreation and leisure space with other user groups. In the era of COVID-19,

trail don't use the trail. Where possible, use loop trails that allow for a single, circular direction of travel back to the point of origin. On loop trails, trail users should travel in a clockwise direction to ensure everyone travels one way in the same direction.

In these challenging times, it is essential to remember that **your health and the health of others is your responsibility.**

Do your part to reduce the spread of the Novel Corona Virus (COVID-19) to 0 transmissions by self-isolating for 14 days if you have been exposed or have any of the symptoms of COVID-19.

Leave No Trace personal hygiene practices help reduce the potential for contact with human fluids that can pose COVID-19 transmission or biohazard risks. In the absence of comfort stations, pit toilets and bush toilets this means depositing solid human waste in catholes dug 6 to 8 inches deep, at least 60 meters from water, trails, parking lots, and campgrounds. Cover and disguise the cathole when finished. Pack out Kleenex, napkins, toilet paper and other hygiene products like wipes, diapers and menstrual hygiene products. Use our handy list of Hygiene Essentials below to plan and prepare ahead for the hygiene and toileting needs of your next day hike.

Peeing in the Woods

Just because peeing in the bush is second nature to some of us doesn't make it ok to duck behind a trailside-tree and pee!

Don't pee (or take care of any of your other personal hygiene business) within 60 meters of hiking trails, camp sites or bodies of water.

This avoids potential cross-contamination and removes animal attractants from proximity to areas of high human usage. And, frankly, no one likes seeing evidence of toileting or other hygiene practice along the trail.

Even if you're anatomically built to aim in the direction of your choosing, avoid aiming at trees or large rocks to avoid unwanted splatter and splash-back. If you are a person who squats to pee, you should find level ground that offers privacy.

Once you've found a spot 60 meters (or more) from the trail, and that meets your privacy needs, no matter how you pee, you should dig a trench or small hole. When urinating, this can be done with the heel of your boot. To the best of your ability, let things flow in the direction of the trench. **Only specialized biodegradable camping toilet paper should be placed in the trench.** Cover the trench and contents with soil. Any non-biodegradable toilet paper or wipes should be safely stored in a Ziplock bag and packed out.

Alternatively, consider using a lightweight microfiber antimicrobial towel, such as a **Kula Cloth**. Simply urinate then use the cloth instead of toilet paper. Then attach the cloth to your bag and let it dry in the sun. The sun and anti-microbial fabric work together to keep the cloth clean. Other more quick-absorbing **pee rag** options include cotton bandanas. I recommend tying a knot in one corner of your cloth or bandana to act as a 'handle' during use and while drying. It also makes it super easy to attach to the bungee cords of your day pack for ease of drying and use.

Be sure to use your hand sanitizer or biodegradable camp soap and a squirt-bottle of water to wash your hands thoroughly, for at least 20 seconds before returning to the trail.

Pooping in the Woods

When pooping in the woods, it is best to avoid rocky areas as digging a cathole can be a challenge. Also, be sure to avoid areas with poison ivy, dog strangling vine, poison oak or other skin irritating fauna.

Once you've found a spot 60 meters (or more) from the trail, that meets your privacy needs, use your spade to dig a cathole 6 to 8 inches deep. Then squat to relieve yourself. Once finished, place used **specialized biodegradable toilet paper** in the cathole, and use your spade to cover the cathole and contents.

Remember, **only specialized biodegradable camping toilet paper should be placed in the trench.** So, safely store any non-biodegradable toilet paper or wipes in a Ziplock bag and pack it out. Be sure to use your hand sanitizer or biodegradable camp soap and a squirt-bottle of water to wash your hands thoroughly, for at least 20 seconds before returning to the trail.

Your Toilet-Training Toddler

If your "bubble" includes infants or toilet-training toddlers, a little extra preparation is required. Where age and developmentally appropriate talk to your children about the fact that everyone needs to pee and poop in the outdoors.

This is an important conversation to have, so be sure to address individual shyness and hygiene factors to make them more comfortable with the idea of it. Be a good role model and offer to be a bio-buddy to look out for their privacy concerns or help them pick a good spot to squat.

Remember, as balance is required for squatting, and aiming is essential to avoid soiling oneself or one's clothing, finding a place with supports like fallen trees and digging wider holes or trenches can really help out your youngster. Offer to hold younger ones up — or find a tree stump or fallen log for support.

Showing them how to balance while holding their clothing to the side (well before the critical hour) may also help.

HYGIENE ESSENTIALS



Toilet Paper

Ziplock bags

Spade

Hand Sanitizer or Camp Soap and a Squirt Bottle of Water

Environmentally-Friendly Feminine Hygiene Products

Environmentally Friendly Diapers and Wipes for Toddlers or Infants

Always remind kiddos to check for damp and soiled clothing, tree bits or debris before pulling up their cloths. Damp clothing should be replaced to avoid chaffing while dirt and debris can be shaken out. Remind them to wash their hands. Be patient and pack spare clothing and a reusable Ziplock bag for soiled cloths. You'll thank us later!

While infants don't require all of the same considerations, it is essential that you pack out any used diapers and wipes in a reusable, sealable bag; plenty of extra Ziplock bags will help. As they say, leave nothing behind but footprints.

Living Actively with Bladder Leaks

Some children, teens, adults, and persons who have gone through childbirth experience bladder leaks. In fact, episodic urinary incontinence affects 51% of persons over the age of 20. Urinary incontinence is the unintentional loss of urine. Stress incontinence happens when physical movement or activity — such as coughing, laughing, sneezing, running, heavy lifting and strenuous hiking — puts pressure (or stress) on your bladder, causing you to leak urine.

Special care should be taken when living actively outdoors with bladder leaks. While ensuring that you stay hydrated, limit your consumption of diuretics like soda, energy drinks, tea, and coffee which may increase your chance of leaking.

Be sure to pack a "go kit" of essential items, including specially designed bladder leak liners (additional advice on packing a 'go kit' is including in the following section on How to Carry and Store Hygiene Items). However, we do recommend including disposal bags that will hold adult-sized incontinence products, such as Heaven Scent Disposal Bags.

Depending on your personal preference and specific needs, there are a variety of options available, including adult diapers with tabs or pull-ons, pads and liners. Some are disposable, whereas others are washable, including incontinence liners, pads and leak-proof incontinence underwear. Where possible, either disposable or washable liners or pads are recommended, as opposed to bulkier disposable

incontinence underwear, or washable absorbent underwear.

ECO makes a cotton reusable antimicrobial panty liner intended for outdoor day use. Liners and pads are less bulky, making them easier to "pack in and pack out" and easier to change on the fly. Make sure that your liners of choice are slim fitting to minimize chaffing potential which can be an issue with pads, or with adult diapers with tabs or pull-ons.

As with drip drying after peeing (which we don't recommend), the potential impacts of a bladder leak include damp / soiled undergarments and increase your risk of a urinary tract infection. We recommend packing non-scented wipes for use after a change, or during a 'freshening up stop' while hiking.

Cotton underwear should be avoided even if using liners. Cotton traps moisture and heat, and after a long day on the trail this can lead to chaffing, in addition to contributing to the potential development of a yeast infection or urinary tract infection.

Irrespective of whether you experience bladder leaks or not, breathable, microfiber, antimicrobial underwear is your best friend on the trail. Also consider clothing that is easy to change and that's comfortable for a hot day. For your top half, this should include breathable, loose-fitting clothing made of either polyester or nylon blend materials. If you are a person who wears a bra, this should be made out of moisture wicking materials. Comfortable form-fitting pants or shorts are essential to minimizing chaffing, and will help keep your liner in place. You can layer a loose pair of shorts or trousers overtop for modesty, if desired. Some shorts even have open vents that you can use on a day hot to improve airflow.

Menstrual Hygiene Considerations

Many novice hikers who menstruate are intimidated by the hygiene considerations and may choose to avoid hiking or other outdoor pursuits during their periods. However, with a bit of preplanning, it's not a big deal and it's certainly better than postponing a highly anticipated trip. The challenge is that this is not a topic frequently talked about by guides, hiking groups or even amongst menstruating hikers and outdoorspersons.

Menstrual Myths

Beliefs about menstruation and the practices which surround it provide the social settings within which people manage their menses. Whether you menstruate or not, being open to discussions about this topic is essential — especially if you are a guide, partner, parent or guardian of someone who does.

Don't socially stigmatize your menstruating hiking buddies, or period-shame your clients, partners, siblings or children. Be open and transparent, communicating only facts.

First things first, there is no evidence that black bears, grizzlies and other large predators are attracted to menstrual blood. Neither are sharks, but if you encounter one of those while hiking in Northern Ontario, you've got bigger things to worry about!

Choices for Menstrual Hygiene

Plan ahead. Organize your supplies into a "go kit". This will help you keep your clean supplies organized and used supplies properly stored. If you are a parent or guardian of teens approaching their menstruating years, pack one of these just in case to help your teen avoid embarrassment. Be sure you understand the basics of backcountry hygiene and Leave No Trace principles so you can pass them on to them.

Your main choices will be tampons or a menstrual cup like the Diva Cup. It is better to leave pads, and menstrual underwear at home — they are bulky and take up extra storage space. Also, if choosing tampons, bring ones without applicators to take up less space when "packing in and packing out". Where possible pack scent-free products, like pre-moistened unscented towelettes for additional hygiene and cleaning needs associated with your period. Scented products can cause irritation and increase the likelihood of a yeast infection, so avoiding their use is key to maintaining your health.

Menstrual cups can be a great eco-friendly choice for any menstruating outdoorsperson and they minimize the need to pack out used menstrual hygiene materials. Cups are made out of flexible silicone or rubber; you insert the cup to catch menstrual blood. You can buy one and reuse it for years with numerous brands manufacturing different sizes based on your age, flow and / or childbirth history. It is important to note that inserting and removing a cup takes practice — it's vital to practice at home and use the cup during one or two

periods before you go backpacking to avoid leaks or other challenges on the trail.

Once you insert the cup - be sure to read and follow the unique manufacturer's instructions - you can usually keep it in for up to 12 hours. Then you remove it - be sure to follow those instructions - and empty the contents into a cathole similar to what you would dig for urinating while on a hike. After you empty the cup, rinse it with clean water if possible (a squirt bottle will help), or wipe it out with tissue or a pre-moistened scent-free towelette, and reinsert it. You can do this as often as you need to. Remember, lack of soap and water to clean your hands and the cup can be a deterrent for some so it's important to pack options if you are a guide, parent or guardian.

If tampons are what you are familiar and comfortable with or you don't like the idea of, or can't get the hang of, the menstrual cup, then feel free to stick with them. Just be aware that they require additional disposal and care steps, and can take up valuable space in your pack. Most importantly, do not bury or burn tampons (pack it in - pack it out). It takes a very hot fire and considerable time to completely burn them.

This makes fire disposal impractical on most day trips and even on many multiday trips. Therefore, place all used tampons, toilet paper and towelettes in double ziplock baggies and store them until they can be safely disposed of at home or at a waste disposal unit at the trail head. See tips on carrying and storing menstrual hygiene items and how to prepare a "go kit".

Hygiene When Menstruating

Be sure to implement additional hygiene practices if you have your period while in the bush. This includes: always washing your hands before removing / inserting a tampon or menstrual cup, or wearing nitrile medical gloves if you cannot wash your hands or your finger nails are dirty.

This reduces the risk of a yeast infection, bacterial vaginosis or toxic shock syndrome. Deposit used gloves in your waste bag, and be sure to wash your hands or use hand sanitizer even if you have worn gloves.

Washing your hands with soap and clean water when you're either in camp or return home is essential; using hand sanitizer while on the trail is a great interim measure but nothing works better than soap and warm water. Also be sure to clean under any rings, or other jewelry, and under your fingernails. On the trail, pre-moistened wipes or towelettes work well for this.

How to Carry & Store Hygiene Items

First ensure that you have sufficient Clean Bags and Waste Bags. Your Clean Bag(s) will include an opaque main bag - we recommend a waterproof roll-top dry bag rather than a stuff sack. This ensures privacy and a good seal. For hands-free access and ease of use, consider using a waist or hip pack or a belt bag. Inside, keep several quart-sized Ziplock bags (usually half a dozen is more than sufficient for toileting and if using tampons on a one to three-day hike; pack more if you need to dispose of bulkier items like diapers, or bladder leak liners, or need to store soiled clothing and based on group size). A couple of bags will be dedicated to storing clean tampons, your menstrual cup(s), liners or diapers with the remainder reserved for use as waste bags or to store soiled clothing.

Also pack hand sanitizer, pre-moistened wipes or towelettes, like **Sea to Summit Wilderness Wipes** (1 to 3 per day per person), toilet paper and, if desired, your preferred pain reliever (e.g. Tylenol or Midol). We also recommend packing biodegradable soap, which is available in spill-proof soap 'leaves' called **Wilderness Wash Pocket Soap** also from **Sea to Summit**, and a squirt bottle for washing hands, menstrual cups and soiled linens. This is especially important when travelling with children.

Disposable Ziplock bags are the best option for waste bags, as they allow you to carry out tampons and soiled toilet paper / wipes / towelettes / clothing. They also work well at controlling odours. If you are worried about odours, consider placing either a dry teabag or some used dried out coffee grounds in each waste bag. You can also put some baking soda in each bag. In preparing your waste bags, line each quart Ziplock waste bag with aluminum foil so that the contents remain private and are easily distinguished for later disposal. You may also wish to reinforce the bag with duct tape, especially if on a multi-day trip when trails and

parks open for this type of use. In which case, forgo the aluminum foil.

As Park's visitor centers and comfort stations are closed across the majority of outdoor spaces, it is essential to pack more personal hygiene items than you foresee needing. You never want to find yourself in a position where you are trying to improvise in the bush!

LNT and Hiking with your Dog

Leave No Trace principles also apply to your four-legged hiking friend. On day hikes its best to pack out poop bags. Remember, be courteous to your fellow trail users, and don't leave filled bags on the trail, or adjacent to waste disposal units at trailheads or in the parking lot. You can use the same principles outlined above to create a Dog Waste 'go bag' that will eliminate odours and ensure that you can safely dispose of dog waste when you return home.

Use biodegradable dog waste bags. Put these, along with hand sanitizer in a clean Ziplock bag. Always pack more bags than you think your dog will need, you never know exactly how many times, or how big, they will go. Extra baggies are handy if a bag rips, or if you encounter other garbage on the trail that you want to pack out. Running out of dog bags is not an excuse to leave your dogs waste on or near the trail! To the best of your ability, know your dog, and know their go. My dog is huge: 95 lbs. On a 45-minute walk at home, she will 'go' at least 3 or 4 times if she's been home all day. On the trail, she will likely double that because the car ride combined with both drinking water and exercise stimulates her bladder and bowels. This means, I usually pack two rolls of biodegradable dog waste bags for a day hike. While it can be tempting to pack your dog's waste bag in their Dog Pack, avoid the temptation! Dogs roll ... learn from my mistake and put it in your own pack.

Enforcing the 60-meter rule for urination breaks isn't practical for dogs unless yours will go on command. However, you should be prepared to interrupt things and move away if your dog begins to pee on or next to the trail or a water source. This is good trail etiquette and reduces congestion.

Speaking of trail etiquette, ensure that you maintain control of your dog at all times. Having your dog on a leash isn't enough. This is especially important given the physical distancing requirements of COVID-19 and has implications for human-bear interactions (see article on page 22).

If your dog is off-leash and doesn't respond to recall well, that adds another potential stressor to encountering other 'bubbles' on the trail. Instead, leash your pet, and step off the trail to yield the right of way to hikers, horses and bikes. You also need to be able to keep your dog calm as other people and pooches pass by.

Recognizing that it isn't always practical to pack out your dog's poops, especially once trails re-open for multiday use, remember that humans and canines have the same Leave No Trace rules for pooping: burying your pet waste in a 6- to 8-inch cathole at least 60 meters from trails, camps and water sources to avoid cross-contamination and remove animal attractants from areas of high human use.

Final Thoughts

Considering all of the challenges presented by the global COVID-19 Pandemic, it is especially important for trail users and outdoorspersons to be aware of their own abilities and their level of familiarity with the outdoors. With COVID-19 already taxing available resources such as medical care, paramedics and police services, do your part by staying safe, and hiking and recreating within your skills so as not to place additional strain on limited local resources such as search and rescue teams, police, paramedics and medical services.

This is particularly true if you are new to hiking, or other summer trail activities. Consider working your way up to longer distance hikes by planning and undertaking shorter walks and hikes within your community. Avoid engaging in recreational activities that bring you in close contact with vulnerable gateway communities and always check to ensure that your recreation destination is open, and accessible for your chosen trail use or outdoors activity.

Lastly, remember that respecting the Emergency Order's implications for trail use includes practicing Leave No Trace principles and limiting yourself to day-use activities, including day hikes, where user amenities like comfort stations, picnic areas and campgrounds remain closed. Use our handy guide to the right to help determine if your recreation is responsible during COVID-19.

Thanks to the following outdoorspersons for their insights while writing this article: Greyson Evans, Raven Booth, Troy Davis, Vanessa Buchan-Hansen and Warren Penney.

THE VOYAGEUR TRAIL ASSOCIATION
PRESENTS

IS MY RECREATION RESPONSIBLE DURING COVID-19?

SIMPLE QUESTIONS TO STAY SAFE



SPENDING TIME OUTDOORS CAN LEAD TO NUMEROUS BENEFITS

Time outside lessens anxiety and reduces feelings of isolation, promotes calm, and lifts moods. It also boosts creativity, and improves self-regulation, self-control and stress-minimization. Exposure to sunlight has also been linked to Vitamin D and beta-endorphin production and to regulation of circadian rhythms.

BUT ... DURING A CRISIS

NOT ALL RECREATION IS RESPONSIBLE.

To help you plan for safe and enjoyable access to and recreation in the outdoors, the Voyageur Trail Association has put together this list of questions to help you decide whether or not your "recreation is responsible".



AM I LEAVING MY HOME COMMUNITY?

Does my recreation bring me in closer contact with vulnerable gateway communities?

Does this activity put me at risk for potential rescue, straining limited local resources?

Have I checked to ensure that my recreation destination is open, and accessible for my recreation activity?



WHAT IS MY POTENTIAL EXPOSURE?

Am I coming into contact with surfaces that can hold and transfer the virus?

Will I potentially come within six feet of people who are not a part of my household (e.g. in parking lots or narrow trails)?

Will this put me in closer contact with vulnerable populations, such as those with compromised immune systems, persons over the age of 65 or those who are pregnant?



IF YOU CAN ANSWER YES TO ANY OF THESE QUESTIONS, PLEASE FIND ANOTHER FORM OF RECREATION OR ALTER YOUR PLANS TO KEEP OUR COMMUNITIES SAFE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

www.voyageurtrail.ca

<https://www.ontarioparks.com/alerts>

<https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/voyage-travel/securite-safety/covid-19-info/covid-19-faq>



BEING OUTSIDE AS MEDICINE

Deana Renaud



Throughout this pandemic there have been three things I keep reflecting on as inherent, profound and essential requirements for my survival (and sanity). I need the outside. I need other humans and physical contact and I need to prioritize my mental health.

For me, working from home has meant endless hours spent in front of my computer screen on Skype, reading, researching, answering emails and preparing resources. It's meant having to redirect my seven-year-old's attention 100 times a day (because it's difficult to understand that Mom is at home but she is working). It's also meant being in my bedroom behind a closed door, away from human contact for the majority of the day.

Over the course of the last few months there have been a few really bad days. Frustrating, exhausting, maddening and devastating. Yesterday was one of them. I will spare you the details and fast forward to the climax: My son and I both screaming at each other, unable to find words, unable to identify antecedents, unable to regulate our emotions. Both of us crying and hugging and me, the parent, the supposed all knowing ... not knowing how to fix this mess.

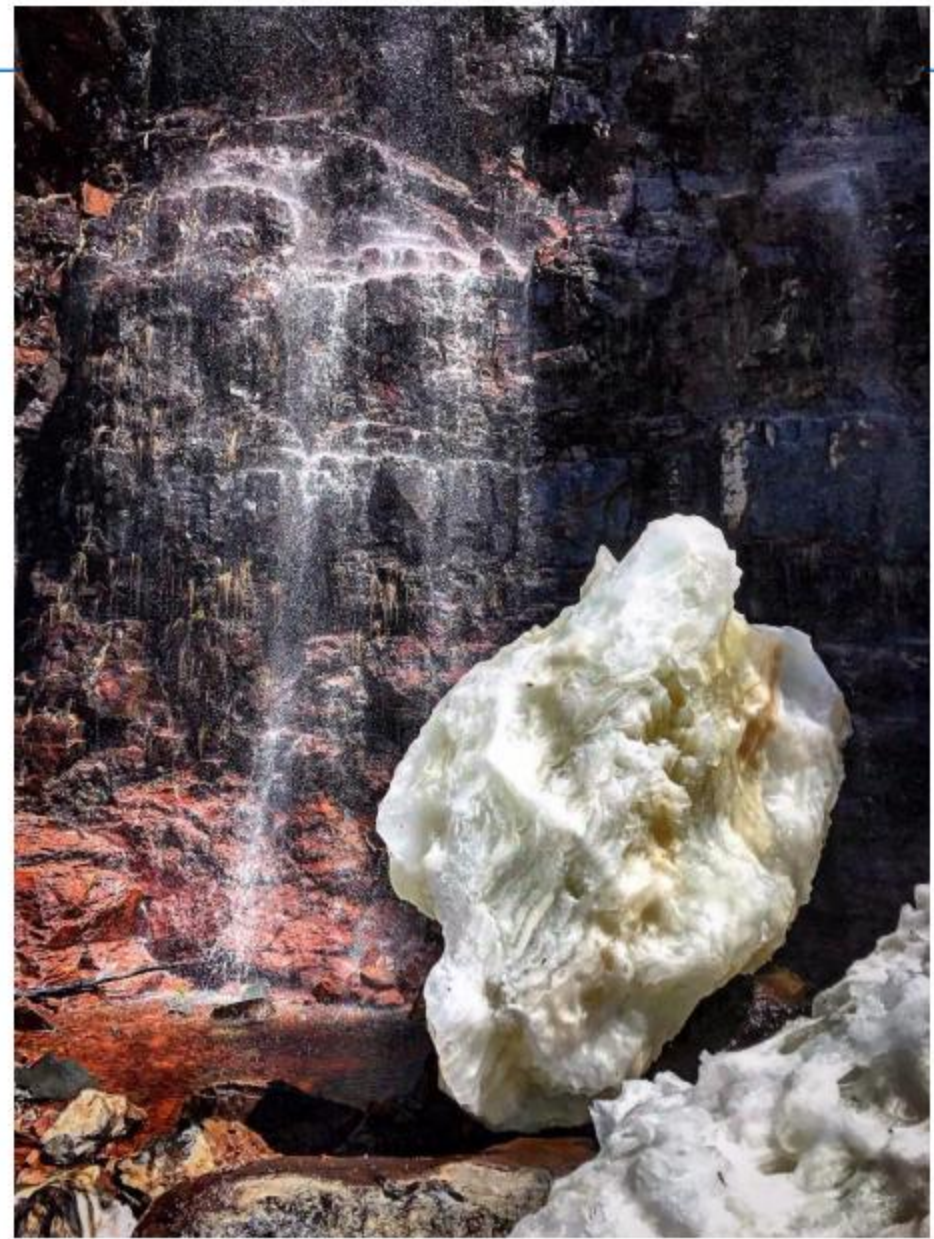
So, I did what I always do in times when I don't know what to do ... made a plan to get into nature. However, this particular time we needed other people. I needed a friend and so did Steven. We needed our energy to be directed away from just each other. So, we reached out.

I believe that there is an important purpose for physical distancing. I believe that it is important to follow guidelines. I ALSO believe in taking calculated risks when you are at a breaking point. Today, a phone call or FaceTime would not have cut it. So, I closed my laptop and shut work down early (with immense guilt ... and don't worry, I made up that time PLUS hours more) and made the conscious and deliberate decision to be around other humans.

We met up with our friends to hike Mazukama Falls, very close to our home in Nipigon. It was a beautiful sunny day. There were nothing but smiling faces. We got dirty and wet and sun-kissed. We laughed and talked and met up with other amazing humans on the trail. You could tell that everyone was seeking connection that day. It's strange in the midst of all of this craziness, how encounters with other people have become more meaningful. More profound. We stop a little longer. Ask a few more questions and are more present when we listen.

When our friends left to go home, and the other hikers made their way off of the trail, Steven and I stayed behind for another hour and a half. Sitting in pools of water and playing in little falls. Talking and hugging and holding hands. Repairing the mess that working from home, distance learning, social isolation and COVID have caused.

On the ride home, Steven looked at me and said (with wisdom and insight beyond his seven years): "*Mom, I think that this hike fixed us. Just like medicine*". The truth in that statement was alarming and it made me feel overwhelmed with gratitude. So, thank you to my friends, the people we came across yesterday. The conversations and smiles and connection. Thank you, Mother Earth, Kama Falls, dirt trails and wet shoes. You were the medicine we needed to fix us.



Deana Renaud is an adventurer at heart and a mental health professional by trade, living, working and wandering in Nipigon, Ontario. She has a Masters degree in Social Work, and is the author of 'Getting Lost on The 49th', a blog about her adventures hiking, travelling, momming and enjoying everything outdoors on the Northwestern shore of Lake Superior and beyond.

She thrives on new experiences, building connections with interesting humans, strong coffee and sugary carbs. If she's not outside, you are most likely to find her face buried in a good book, mouth full of dark chocolate.

You can read her blog at:
<https://gettinglostonthethe49th.wordpress.com/>.

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The Voyageur Trail Association

The Voyageur Trail Association (VTA) was founded in 1973 with a vision to work with volunteers and partner organizations to build a continuous wilderness-style hiking trail from Sudbury through Sault Ste. Marie to Thunder Bay, a distance of some 1,100 km paralleling the rugged Northern Ontario shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior.

The Voyageur Trail is a true wilderness trail, some remote or little used sections may be difficult due to fallen trees or regrowth. Use at your own risk.

The Voyageur Trail Association is a non-profit, charitable organization. REG. #119261923RR0001.

The Voyageur Trail Association is comprised of a Coordinating Council with elected members representing the Association's membership at regional and national stakeholder levels through organizations like Hike Ontario.

The Coordinating Council

The Coordinating Council of the Voyageur Trails Association is comprised of the Executive, Members-at-Large, and the Directors. At the 2019 AGM the following positions were filled:

President: Vacant
 Vice President - East: Vacant
 Vice President - Central: Mark Crofts
 Vice President - West: Matt Borutski
 Treasurer: Kees van Frankenhuyzen
 Secretary: Jenn Smith
 Publicity Director: Vacant
 Social Media Coordinator: Kelsey Johansen
 Newsletter Editor: Kelsey Johansen
 Trails Master: Harvey Lemelin
 Trails Data Manager: Heath Bishop
 Webmaster: Sandra Turgeon
 Insurance Coordinator: Larry Gringorten
 Membership Coordinator: Chris Kuntz
 Guidebook Chair: Steve Dominy
 Hike Ontario Rep: Harvey Lemelin

If you are interested in fulfilling one of these roles, please email us at: info@voyageurtrail.ca.

Clubs

The Saulteaux VTA Club was the first Voyageur Trail Club established in 1974. Headquartered in Sault Ste. Marie this Club champions the Saulteaux, Desbarats, Thessalon and Echo Ridge sections of the Trails.

The 44 km Penewobikong section of the Voyageur Trail was developed by original member Norm Ledielt who maintained the trail from 1973 to 1995. Today this section from Granary to Iron Bridge is maintained by a small dedicated team of three who make up the Penewobikong Hiking Club.

The Coureurs de Bois VTA Club is headquartered in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada and stewards the Coureurs de Bois section of the Trail.

The Marathon VTA Club, which is comprised of the newly established Group of Seven Trail as well as the Picnic Table Lookout trail, Hawks Ridge Trail and Lunam Lake Lookout Trail is comprised of regional stakeholders including Pic River First Nation, Parks Canada and the Marathon Economic Development Corporation.

Spanning Terrace Bay to Rossport, the Casque Isles VTA Club derives its name from John Bigsby's 1823 appraisal of Superior's north shore from the top of Pic Island. This Club manages the Casque Isles Trail in conjunction with regional partners like Ontario Parks.

On September 1st, 2012 the Voyageur Trail Association welcomed its first new Club in over 30 years. The Nor'wester Voyageur Trail Club spans from the Casque Isles Trail VTA Club north through the communities of Nipigon, Red Rock, Dorion, Hurkett, Shuniah, Thunder Bay and Neebing to the Ontario / Minnesota border at Pigeon River.

Become a Member Today!

Purchasing a VTA membership demonstrates your support for the vision and work of the Voyageur Trail Association. As a not-for-profit organization, the VTA depends on donations, volunteers, and membership revenue to support its operations. Members are eligible for exclusive discounts at participating businesses along the trail route and enjoy voting privileges at annual meetings. Most importantly, purchasing a membership means you have played an important part in the development of a 1,100 km hiking trail through some of Ontario's most splendid wilderness. A paid membership supports trail maintenance, insurance for our guided hikes and other outings, like work parties, as well as production of the VT Newsletter and Guidebook.

Memberships can be purchased for either a one- or three-year duration, and include Individual and Family (all individuals residing at the same address) memberships. Discounted Student memberships are also available (for 1- or 3-year durations).

Memberships can be purchased on our website at <https://www.voyageurtrail.ca/memberships/> or visit our online store to purchase the official Voyageur Trail Association Guidebook, or trail guides. You can also purchase advertising space in our Newsletter, Guidebook or on our Website, or make a charitable donation to the Association at <https://www.voyageurtrail.ca/shop/>.

Thank you to all our amazing Community Partners, Land Owners, Trail Adopters, Clubs, Volunteers and Members.

We couldn't do it without you!



MID PANDEMIC REFLECTIONS

On trail organizations and the need for collective responsibility during COVID-19

Harvey Lemelin

Recognizing that the pandemic is not over, these mid-pandemic reflections provide an opportunity to pause and reflect on the past and gaze forward. Managing the pandemic for many trail organizations has proven to be a challenging, overwhelming, and for some, a somewhat divisive, issue. Not only are clubs faced with the cancellation of club-lead hikes, special events, and trail maintenance strategies, they also had to temporarily warn against trail use, while still informing individuals determined to access the trails how to minimize contracting or dispersing COVID-19.

Although communication is a crucial component of trail management, various aspects like what to say, how to say it, and where to say it (e.g., newsletters, at the trailhead, on social media), and most recently when to change the messaging, have taxed many organizations.

Some organizations responded admirably while others came up short. In some instances, the lack of support from officials already burdened with other aspects of managing the pandemic, a clear line of communication with experts familiar with liability and legalities, multi-jurisdictional questions, and challenges in dealing with online conferences

and meetings proved to be quite demanding.

In other cases, contradictory messaging like 'do not go outside' and/or 'go outside', by federal, provincial and even municipal agencies and services further complicated matters. Despite these challenges, what was clear is that something needed to be said.

Trail organizations have responded in various ways to get their messages out to trail users, with some providing basic information at trailheads, and others providing comprehensive messaging at the trailheads and across social media platforms.

A review of these messages illustrated

resources at their own risk (with varying degrees of safety and risk management practiced).

In some locales, this resulted in trails being heavily damaged by excessive springtime use and in other it has resulted in more litter being left along trails. In some jurisdictions, trail access resulted in tense interactions between diverse modes of trail users and locals including complaints to law enforcement, attempts at social media shaming, and in rare cases, vandalism.

The official re-opening of trails located in provincial parks and conservation reserves a

The re-opening of trails is not a right, it is privilege. A privilege which is provided to individuals through the hard work of various associations, organizations, clubs, agencies, and dedicated individuals.

diverse strategies, some were clear and concise, while others were convoluted and poorly designed, typically because of a rush to share media. Others were insufficient, assuming that if someone was still going to access the trail, they had the appropriate knowledge and experience to do so.

Unsurprisingly, many trail users were not dissuaded by messages or preventative strategies like gates and continued to use the trails and other outdoor recreation

few weeks ago, required a modification of messaging aimed towards trail users, including additional information regarding the differences between conservation reserves and conservation areas and their allowed recreational activities.

Once again, some agencies and trail organizations responding brilliantly, while others continued to struggle with clear and concise messaging.

Consisting of a good balance of information, some of the best messaging regarding safe recreational practices during a pandemic was produced by the U.S. National Park Service. Perhaps this is because the U.S. National Park Service has had to deal with similar issues in the past, including during the 2018 Shutdown of the US Federal Government. Or, perhaps it is because this agency is still fervently dedicated to communication based on the art of interpretation?

The rescue of two stranded trespassing hikers on a section of the Gros Cap (private property which is not part of the Voyageur Hiking Trail's Gros Cap Loop Trail near Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario) by the Ontario Provincial Police Emergency Services Unit during the May long weekend should remind users that it is essential that they use caution and be well prepared while exploring our hiking trails.

Preparation includes providing someone who isn't going on your hike with your hiking plan, staying on marked trail (avoiding trespassing but also avoiding the use of unofficial trails particularly during the different hunting seasons), hiking according to one's skill sets and current weather conditions, and packing out everything that is taken in. For a refresher on Leave No Trace Principles, and how to 'pack it in, pack it out' please see our article *'How to Poop in the Woods'*, on page 7 of this edition.

Lastly, some consideration of Emergency Services Units is required when assessing the risk of one's leisure activities in our current pandemic. In being called out to rescue trail users who have gotten in over their heads, these individuals put themselves at further risk of contracting COVID-19 while also reducing their availability to maintaining essential policing services.

The re-opening of trails is not a right, it is privilege. A privilege which is provided to individuals through the hard work of various associations, organizations, clubs, agencies, and dedicated individuals.

The phased return to use needs to be respected and understood, given the diverse jurisdictions involved at the federal, provincial / territorial, regional and municipal level. Degrees of phased re-opening will occur in ways that reflect the capacity of organizations to ensure the safety of recreationist and trail users, as well as that of their staff and volunteers.

While it can be easy to advocate a rush to re-open backcountry areas because of the perceived reduction in risk of encountering other trail users, other factors are at play. For example, many organizations have yet to hire their full compliment of summer staff, and are in the process of recalling their seasonal and full-time employees to on-site work. With the COVID-19 delay to start-up, fire crews, search and rescue staff and emergency response personnel are currently being hired and undertaking in-service training before being ready for active service in parks, protected areas, and on crown lands. As such, organizations are not best positioned to respond to remote emergencies, or forest fires, and have tentatively opened the front country areas for recreational use as a part of a phased approach.

For example, Ontario Parks began reopening front country services in Southern Ontario on May 11th, with their Northwestern Ontario Field Unit beginning a phased re-open on May 15th. Now, beginning on June 1st, 2020, Ontario Parks will be offering backcountry camping in 20 operating provincial parks and all non-operating provincial parks and conservation reserves, where it is normally permitted. No more than 5 people can occupy a backcountry campsite following the province's current restrictions, unless from the same household. However, the closure of front country campgrounds is being extended to June 14 at this time due

to the risk of exposure presented by high contact areas like washrooms, water spigots, and waste transfer stations. Other Ontario Parks' facilities including campgrounds, beaches, roofed accommodations, picnic shelters and Visitor Centers will continue to remain closed.

Commencing June 5th, 2020, some Parks Canada places, including Pukaskwa National Park, will begin to offer limited access and services while maintaining physical distancing measures. Only places and activities where health and safety risks can be managed will be available for visitation.

The mid-Pandemic pause has provided organizations like these, as well as clubs, associations, agencies, rescue units, and trail users with an opportunity to reflect on lessons learned and to proactively implement a phased return to service that promotes a cautious and public-health focused approach.

Approaches have included reviewing the legalities associated to trail management in pandemics and similar situations and placing a greater priority on the art of interpretation and appropriate communication, and then incorporating these requirements into future strategic plans and / or management plans.

Opportunities to learn what worked well and what did not work as well from multiple partners, through conferences or workshops (be they virtual or otherwise), will also prove quite useful for some club and agencies.

Lastly, trail organizations should take this opportunity to unite provincially and perhaps even federally, for if one thing that has been made clear regarding this pandemic it is that provincial and federal agencies that should not and do not have the sole voice in managing outdoor recreation and/or dictating trail use in this province or in this country.

For help determining if your recreation is responsible during the phased reopening, please see our infographic on page 11.

May 2019 Saulteaux Spring Clean Up!

Mark Crofts

The week of May 11th, 2019 was Trail Maintenance Week.

On May 11th, we chose the then messiest portion of the trail in our Section. The trail parallels 6th Line and Highway 17 and both motorways are festooned with litter every spring. It really is amazing just how much junk is deposited over the course of a year ... and an

interesting assemblage of junk it is.

From a delicate high heel shoe to a 30-foot length of big "o" drainage pipe, this area had it all. Seven VTA members filled 10 big garbage bags with trash that day.

On the evening of May 13th, Cheryl and I paddled up the Root River in the same area by canoe and collected another two big bags of litter!

On Wednesday the 14th, 18 VTA members, along with members of the Sault Naturalists and friends focused on the west side of Highway 17. They found very little garbage but several large trees were cleared from the trail and a number of blazes were replaced.

Thanks to all who participated in the 2019 Trail Maintenance Week! We look forward to hosting one again in 2021.

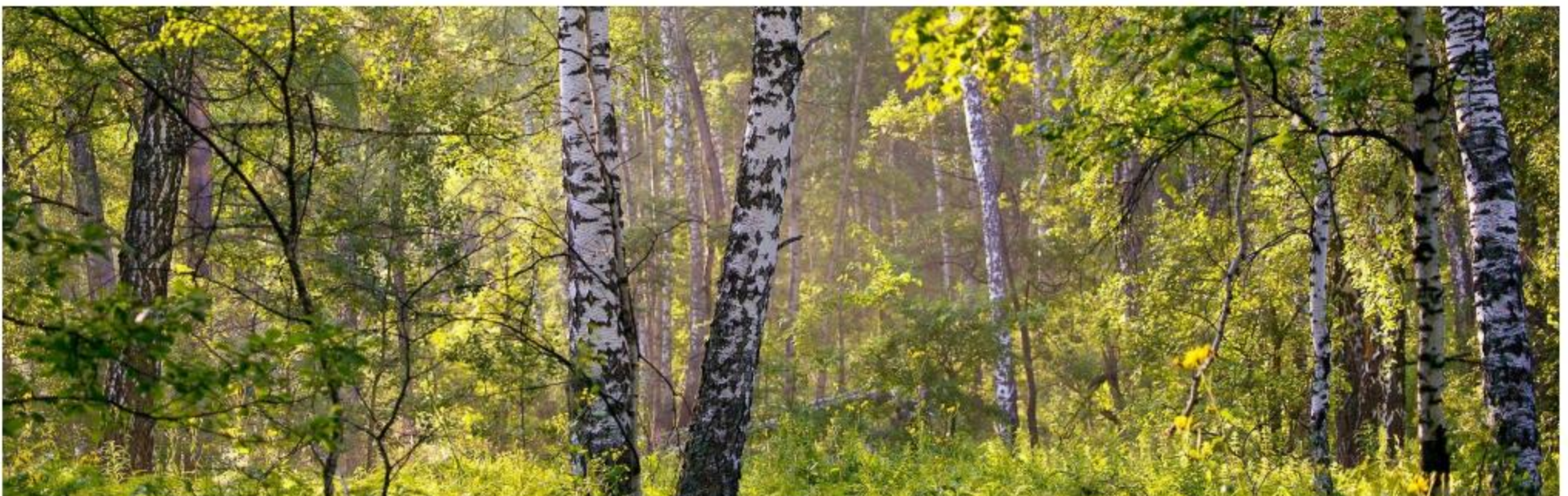


Ila, joined by Carole Blaquiere (then Association President) and other Saulteaux VTA Club Members, installs the new VTA trail marker at the corner of Highway 17 and 6th Line, near Sault Ste. Marie in May 2019.



CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS FALL 2020 ISSUE

If you are interested in contributing to our Fall 2020 Issue, please contact Kelsey Johansen (Newsletter Editor) at KelseyMJohansen@gmail.com. Each issue contains a regional trail feature, highlighting an area of the trail, so if there is a trail that your Club maintains please be in touch. We also accept contributions highlight recent outings, upcoming events and trail user information updates. Deadline for submissions for the Fall 2020 Issue is August 1st, 2020.



Batchewana Island Paddle June 2019

Theresa Glover with Update from Mark Crofts



Captions: The intrepid group of paddlers (above), moose tracks (opposite page, top left), heron rookery on a nearby island (opposite page, top right), and red kayak pulled up in the shallows of a still lake (opposite page, bottom).

This was the first kayak outing of 2019 for most of us. A 12-kilometer paddle took us around the eastern half of Batchewana Island. Great company, perfect weather, and a refreshing swim all made for a fantastic outing. The accompanying pictures are each “worth 1000 words”, as the saying goes.

Some may recall that three years ago there was a proposal floated by the landowner (the island is owned by an American fellow) to build a lodge and an airstrip on the island. An information session was held, which was attended by an overflowing crowd. The proposal has apparently been shelved, at least for the near term.



HIKER SAFETY ADVISORY

Changes in Spring Bear Hunting Regulations

Kelsey Johansen

The Voyageur Trail Association's Coordinating Council has recently become aware of **an amendment to Ontario Regulation 665/98 (Hunting)** which took effect for the 2020 Spring Bear Hunting season, spanning May 1st through June 15th, 2020 (inclusive). This change has implications for hikers, and hiker safety.

In implementing the change, **the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has reduced the minimum distance requirement for placement of bait near rights of way and trails for black bear hunting from 200m to 30m.**

The Ontario Government made the decision to implement the proposed revision to the Regulation after the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry posted the proposal on the Environmental Registry for a 47-day comment period (May 1st through June 17th, 2019) in which over 600 members of the public responded. Regrettably, organizations like the Voyageur Trails Association were not invited to stakeholder consultations on the proposed implementation, nor was there notification from the Ministry regarding implementation of the amendment to allow for communications with our memberships prior to the commencement of the 2020 Spring Bear Hunt.

While the VTA recognizes that the environmental impacts of this change are expected to be neutral, this decision presents a real and considerable risk of both negative human-wildlife interactions and negative interactions amongst trail user groups and outdoor recreationists.

Since the phased reopening of natural areas around Ontario commenced on May 11th, 2020, the Voyageur Trail Association has seen a dramatic increase in inquiries from novice hikers across our social media platforms seeking information about suitable day hikes across the Trail. As novice hikers, with limited outdoor skills, experience and knowledge, these persons are typically unaware of the need to wear high-visibility clothing during hunting seasons, when hunting seasons occur, and the urgency of this practice that accompanies changes in the Spring Bear Hunt regulations which increases the risk to hikers.

Therefore, in response, the Voyageur Trail Association launched a social media campaign on May 28th 2020, the aim of which is to ensure safe trail access for all user groups, including encouraging all trail users to wear blaze orange until the Spring bear hunt ends on June 15th, 2020.

The campaign will also address hiker safety measures, how to respond to bear encounters on or near the trail and calls on the Ministry to review its decision based on a lack of stakeholder consultation (see examples of the campaign messaging on the page opposite), and follow the hashtag #BeSafeBeSeen on our social media platforms.

Hikers who are on the trail, as well as those who depart the trail to practice Leave No Trace Principles related to human hygiene (see article started on page 6, this edition), are strongly encouraged to wear blaze orange or other high-visibility clothing or markers (e.g. bandanas or hats) to ensure that they are seen. If hiking with your pet, please ensure they are leashed, and that they are wearing the appropriate blaze orange hunting vest or a high-visibility bandana or collar.

The Voyageur Trail Association's Coordinating Council would like to see the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry implement a two-year trial period in which the minimum distance requirement for placement of bait near rights of way and trails for black bear hunting is set at 100m, not 30m, and that the Ministry provide signage for display at trailheads to advise hikers of the change in regulation. Furthermore, the Coordinating Council encourages the Ministry to engage in public consultation with organizations like the Voyageur Trail Association and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, the Ontario Trails Council and Hike Ontario to study the impact of this decision on all user groups.

If you encounter bears on the trail, or experience a negative interaction with another trail user, including hunters, please contact your local Club representatives or regional Vice-President (contact information for the VTA Coordinating Council and Clubs is available on page 14).

For more information on the Spring Bear Hunt please visit:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/hunting>



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

WEAR BLAZE ORANGE
AND AVOID CLOTHING THAT
BLENDS IN LIKE BEIGE,
BROWN, WHITE, OR GREEN.



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

KEEP YOUR PET ON A LEASH,
AND ENSURE THAT THEY
HAVE A BLAZE ORANGE
JACKET, BANDANA OR OTHER
HI-VIS MARKERS ON.



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

STICK TO ESTABLISHED TRAILS. THIS
IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AS
HUNTING REGULATIONS HAVE
CHANGED ALLOWING BEAR BAIT
TO BE PLACED WITHIN
30M OF A TRAIL.



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

HIKE WITH A BUDDY AND AS
ALWAYS, LET SOMEONE KNOW
WHERE YOU ARE GOING, AND WHEN
TO EXPECT YOU BACK.
CHECK IN WHEN YOU RETURN.



HUNTING SEASON INFORMATION IS
POSTED ON THE MINISTRY OF
NATURAL RESOURCES AND
FORESTRY WEBSITE:

[HTTPS://WWW.ONTARIO.CA/PAGE/HUNTING](https://www.ontario.ca/page/hunting)



BE SAFE, BE SEEN



THE VTA REMINDS ALL
ONTARIO TRAIL USERS THAT
THE SPRING BEAR HUNT
RUNS UNTIL
JUNE 15TH 2020



Please visit www.voyageurtrail.ca for details



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

HUNTING IS A SAFE RECREATIONAL
ACTIVITY IN ONTARIO, AND
NON-HUNTERS SHOULD FEEL
COMFORTABLE USING THE WOODS AT
ANY TIME OF THE YEAR.



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

BE AWARE WHEN HUNTING IS
TAKING PLACE.
KNOW THE SEASONS, DATES,
LOCATIONS.



BE SAFE, BE SEEN

AVOID DAWN AND DUSK,
AND ANYTIME VISIBILITY IS
LIMITED.



In light of these changes, and recognizing that hunters can now place bait 30m from a trail, the Voyageur Trails Association Coordinating Council reminds all trail users to **Be Bear Wise**. When black bears are caught off guard, they are stressed, and usually just want to flee. Generally, the noisier the black bear is, the less dangerous it is, provided you do not approach. The noise is meant to “scare” you off and acts as a warning signal.

First, it is important to recognize the difference between a defensive and an aggressive bear. **Black bear attacks are extremely rare.**

A threatened black bear will give off warning signs to let you know you are too close. **A black bear standing on its hind legs is not a sign of aggressive behaviour.** The bear is trying to get a better look at you or catch your scent to assess the threat.

If a bear feels threatened, it will respond defensively by:

- salivating excessively and exhaling loudly,
- making huffing, moaning, clacking and popping sounds with its mouth, teeth and jaws,
- lowering its head with its ears drawn back while facing you, and
- charging forward, and/or swatting the ground with its paws (known as a ‘bluff’ charge).

On the other hand, a **predatory bear will approach silently**, usually in rural or remote areas, and may continue to approach

regardless of your attempts to deter them by yelling or throwing rocks.

Your behaviours can help prevent negative bear encounters by using the following Bear Wise Do’s and Don’ts from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Do:

- Slowly back away while keeping the bear in sight and wait for it to leave.
- If the bear does not leave, throw objects, wave your arms and make noise with a whistle or air horn.
- Prepare to use bear spray.
- If you are near a building or vehicle get inside as a precaution.
- Drop any food you may be carrying and slowly move away.
- If a bear is in a tree, leave it alone. Leave the area. The bear will come down when it feels safe.

Don’t:

- Run, climb a tree or swim.
- Kneel down.
- Make direct eye contact.
- Approach the bear to get a better look.
- Attempt to feed a bear.

If the bear attacks:

- use bear spray,
- fight back with everything you have, and
- do not play dead unless you are sure a mother bear is attacking in defense of her cubs.

Most times a bear will leave without more than a defensive display. After the bear leaves, report the bear encounter to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry by calling 1-866-514-2327 (TTY 705-945-7641), and to your local VTA Club using the

contact details on page 14 of this newsletter.

If the bear was eating non-natural food (such as garbage or bird food), remove or secure the item – provided it is not intentionally set bear bait. If you encounter bear bait on the trail, or closer than 30m to the trail, report it to the OMNRF and your Local VTA Club. Do not remove it.

Prevent conflicts with black bears by minimizing strong food aromas on the trail, and avoiding leaving foodstuffs or litter behind. Practicing the Leave No Trace Principles outlined in our article on page 6 will help!

If bears learn that they can find food where people live or recreate, they are very likely to return as long as the food source is available.

Responsible pet ownership can also help minimize the risk of conflict with a black bear, so **leash your dog(s) when in bear country to reduce the potential of dogs harassing a black bear or of being attacked by one.**

Unleashed dogs may instigate a chase response that may lead the bear back to you; this is particularly true if a female bear perceives your dog(s) as a threat to her cubs.

Relocation and dispatch of bears are poor ways of trying to prevent conflicts with bears.

You can learn more about the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Bear Wise program by visiting:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/prevent-bear-encounters-bear-wise>

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THE VOYAGEUR TRAIL ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

