

ISSUE

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Voyageur Trail Association Newsletter

Summer 2021







LETTER FROM *THE EDITOR*

Welcome to the Summer 2021 Edition of the VTA Newsletter!

This edition of the VTA Newsletter features articles on paggaling – a way of paddling for the planet by helping to preserve our waterways through regional clean-up efforts, and one family's self-guided Spring Break Hiking Challenge in which they hiked nine trails, spanning 50 kilometers, in nine days, as well as Tyler's paddling adventures.

We're also pleased to provide you with a number of updates from across the Voyageur Trail, including details of a section of the Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail which is being built just outside of Marathon this summer. Our Trails Master also provides important updates, including a list of trail advisories, including trail condition reports and several trail closures spanning the length of the Trail.

Lastly, we close off this edition of the VTA Newsletter by exploring trail use levels along the Robertson Cliffs and King Mountain Trail segments, and by looking at responsible trail use and the VTA Trail User Code.

As we move into the Summer Hiking season, be sure to follow us on social media (Instagram and Facebook) at @voyageurtrailassociation for the most recent updates on trail conditions, temporary logging closures, and trail crew work parties.

We're looking forward to a time when you can join us on the trails and at events again. Until then, make sure you recreate responsibly by following local guidelines from your regional health authority regarding group size and travel restriction

Happy Trails,

Kelsey Johansen

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**COVER IMAGE
PIXABAY**



PAGGALING or PAGGLEING: Paddling for the Planet

Mark Crofts

“Plogging for the Planet” was the title of an interesting article in last years Spring 2000 newsletter. We learned that “plogging” is a portmanteau of jogging and the Swedish phrase “plocka upp”, meaning to pick up. I’ve never been able to understand how the grimaces and sweat worn by my jogger friends reconcile with the fun they claim they are having. Since we have yet to discover the joys of jogging, we are perfecting the sport of paggleing.

We start paggleing as soon as the ice is out on the true voyageur trails...the waterways. Sadly, our “modern”, “sophisticated” and “highly developed” society does not treat our waterways with the respect they deserve. Our society fouls the very waters of life with all manner of debris. We, and many others, have taken up the challenge of doing what we can to rid the waters of this scourge.

We’re hopeful that the federal governments coming ban on certain single use plastics will reduce the amount of paggleing that we need to do and we can return to just plain paddling. Hopeful, but reconciled to the huge amount of paggleing that still needs to be done. And so, on this Earth Day, we salute the other “pagglers” out there and call on others to join in this rewarding pastime! Happy paggleing!



Previous Page:
“Paggleing” the Root River in Sault Ste. Marie. Scott, Cheryl and I have hauled at least four canoe loads of thrash out of this river in the last two years.

This page:
Paggleing” at Batchewana Island. Scott, Kees, Cheryl and I found a lost dock washed up on shore, complete with its polystyrene foam floats. We dismantled the dock and took the floats to the dump.



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, Director-at-Large, and the Directors. At the 2020 AGM the following positions were filled:

President: Carole Blaquiére
 Vice President - East: Martin Turner
 Vice President - Central: Mark Crofts
 Vice President - West: Matt Borutski
 Past President - Susan Graham
 Treasurer: Kees van Frankenhuyzen
 Secretary: Danaé Ingram
 Publicity Director: Vacant
 Membership: Ruth Beaumont
 Trails Master: Doug Elson
 Hike Ontario Rep: Harvey Lemelin

Director-At-Large: Carolyn Reid

Social Media: Kelsey Johansen
 Newsletter Editor: Kelsey Johansen
 Trails Data Manager: Heath Bishop
 Insurance: Larry Gringorten
 Guidebook Chair: Steve Dominy
 Webmaster: Sandra Turgeon

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 Ledietz 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 **Coueurs de Bois VTA Club** is headquartered in Elliot Lake, Ontario, Canada and stewards the Coueurs 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.

Thank you to all our volunteers, at the Club and Association level - we couldn't do it without you!

Become a Member Today!

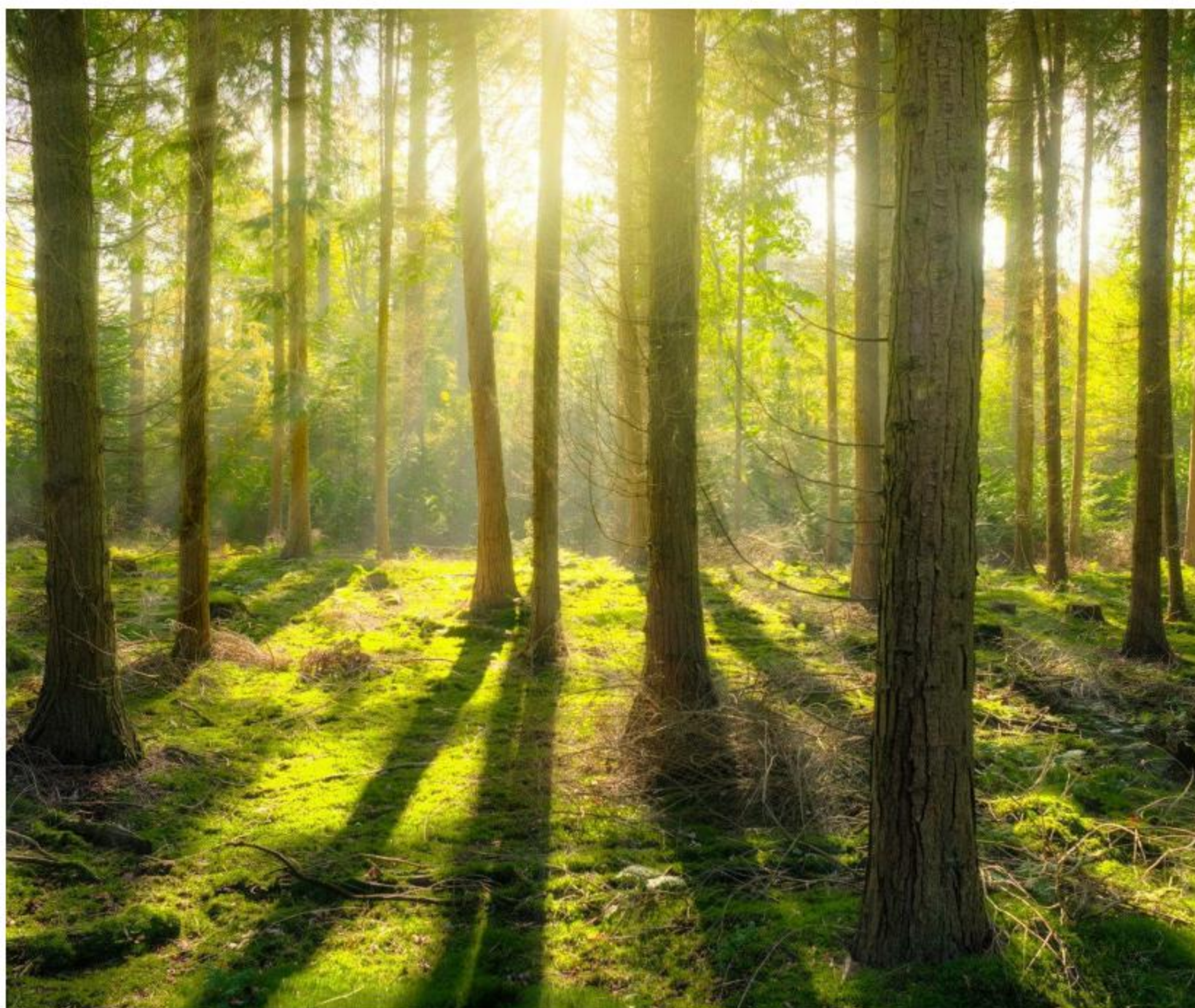
Purchasing a VTA membership demonstrates your support for the vision and work of the Voyageur Trail Association. As a not-for-profit organization, the VTA depends on donations, volunteers, and membership revenue to support its operations. Members are eligible for exclusive discounts at participating 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 VTA 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!!



SPRING BREAK HIKING CHALLENGE

The Lockdown Edition

Tonia Van Kempen



We are fortunate to live in one of the most beautiful regions of Ontario. Of course, it's a matter of perspective, but to us lockdown in the Algoma Highlands and along the Eastern shoreline of Lake Superior is akin to being stranded on a deserted island (with supplies). For those adventurous of spirit, there are certainly worse places to maroon! This year also provided a unique set of circumstances. The combination of the latest round of stay-at-home restrictions, a relatively early snow melt, and a delayed spring break from school; all inspired our family to take to the hills. In this manner, the Spring Break Hiking Challenge (The Lockdown Edition) was conceived: 9 days, 9 trails and 50 kilometers.

Making Lemonade

Our kids, ages 9 and 7, ate it up. Together, we selected nearby sections along the Voyageur Trail and the Hub system that would amount to 50 km. These trails bisect provincial parks, conservation areas and the City of Sault Ste. Marie and are all in our backyard. Sure, there would be tears, scrapped knees and wet feet but there would also be smiles, remote waterfalls, wildlife and breathtaking vistas.

Motivated? Here's our short list:

- (1) Edmund Fitzgerald Trail Pancake Bay (7km)
- (2) Robertson Cliffs (Ila's Loop + Waterfall Side Trail) (6km)
- (3) Gros Cap Bluffs Loop (3km)
- (4) Jewelweed Loop (4km)
- (5) Havilland Bay Lookout (5km)
- (6) Harmony Eagle Ridge Trail (3.5km)
- (7) Hub Trail Fort Creek Loop (2km)
- (8) Goulais Top O' The Hill Trail (10km)
- (9) Hiawatha Beaver Loop (9.5km)



The Hills Are Alive

We weren't alone. The pandemic has brought more people in to the forests and along hiking paths to find adventure. Algoma's extensive network of trails really sets this region apart. Even for avid hikers, there are so many new trails still out there just waiting to be experienced. Our latest set, included two 'new to us' sections at Havilland and Harmony, but even our go to favourites offered a distinctive flavour this time of year. We found solace around kilometer twenty-seven in the brief moments between snow melt and a forest in bloom.





Setting up your own hiking challenge is a fun way to set fitness goals. Your challenge can be tailored to the individual, family or group. You set the skill level, the timelines and the expectations. We even incorporated prizes into our challenge to make it more enticing. These consisted of Algoma Highland Conservancy Buffs and new running shoes for the kids for reaching the halfway mark and mission accomplished milestones.

All-in-all the challenge was a great way to make the most of a very unique Spring Break. A memorable experience, lots of fresh air, exercise, and family time, but most of all it was an incredible week to watch the forest come alive!





CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS Fall 2021 ISSUE

If you are interested in contributing to our Fall 2021 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 2021 Issue is August 1st, 2021.**



TRAIL WORK CONTINUES on the GROUP OF SEVEN LAKE SUPERIOR TRAIL in 2021

Kirsten Spence



The Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail Association is ramping up for a busy trail construction season. After being on limited activities in 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the group is moving forward with hiring their Trail Crew and are planning on building new trail to the top of Peninsula Hill this summer.

While Peninsula Hill is not a Group of Seven Painting site, the hill itself is depicted in a number of the iconic painters works. Painting from the west, group members like Lawren Harris captured the unique shape of the islands and hills around what is now the Town of Marathon. This new 800 meter trail will provide interpretation back to the painting sites and incorporate an accessible boardwalk to view Lake Superior.

The Group of Seven Lake Superior Trail manages 35 kilometers of designated Voyageur Trail from the mouth of the Pic River to Sturdee Cove (just west of Marathon). The group is working on building new trail to connect from Marathon to Coldwell. This stretch of Lake Superior Coast was very inspirational to the Group of Seven and they made numerous trips to the area every autumn between 1921 and 1928. This new trail project will link some of the painting locations with a wilderness hiking trail so trail enthusiasts and art lovers alike can experience what Lawren Harris, Franklin Carmichael and AJ Casson were inspired by when they visited the area a hundred years ago.

“Five of the members of the art group visited the area with Harris coming every year” says Project Coordinator Kirsten Spence. “They were very productive when they came and went home with many field sketches and drawings to turn into studio paintings over the winter months. Many of these works are now found in galleries like the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, the National Gallery and the Art Gallery of Ontario to name a few”.

“The Peninsula Hill Trail is to provide a shorter experience for visitors to learn about the project if they are stopping into Marathon for a short visit and hopefully entice them to come back for a longer period of time later. Many local residents will also utilize the trail and the views from the top of the hill are nothing short of spectacular” says Bob Hancherow, President of the G7 Trail. A resident of Marathon for most of his life, Bob is quick to point out the beauty of Northshore Lake Superior and its attraction for the famous painters searching for new landscapes to create a distinct Canadian style.

The group teamed up with [Mike Antonietti](#) whose drone made the initial trail planning easier Antonietti’s [Mill Hill - YouTube](#) video highlights the inspiring views you will be able to enjoy following the trails completion. This trail segment will be part of the overall Waterfront redevelopment plans that the Town of Marathon is currently working on, having secured over 800 acres of land from the former pulp mill connecting Pebble Beach to Carden Cove. The larger Group of Seven Trail is anticipated to be connected by Fall 2022. Please visit www.groupofseventrail.com for more information.



TYLER'S PADDLING TRIP

Tyler van Frankenhause

Hello, my name is Tyler. I am a 31-year-old guy who has cerebral palsy. I cannot walk, and use a wheelchair to get around. I also have scoliosis, so I cannot balance on a bench. I have limited use of my arms and cannot do a single paddle stroke. Yet, every summer I spend a lot of time in a canoe, even braving the unpredictable waters of Lake Superior.

My Dad has figured out adapted seating that allows me to sit in a canoe, and how to collapse my wheelchair so it can travel with us (with my dog, of course). And so off we go, exploring on nice calm days, sometimes staying overnight on a secluded beach somewhere. Usually, we do day trips from Agawa Bay, our camping base.

My Dad's goal (not necessarily mine!) is to get me to places where 'no person (in a wheelchair) has been before'. I am glad my chair has brakes!

Last November (2020) we were invited by three hard-core VTA members, Mark, Cheryl and Scott, to help with a beach cleanup paddle on Batchawana Island. The trip was a great success: the day was exceptionally nice and warm, we collected literally tons of garbage, and my Dad and Scott did not dump the canoe!





A lot more challenging was our Voyageur Canoe Brigade trip in two North canoes from Batchawana Bay to Bruce Mines in 2017 to celebrate Canada's 150th birthday. We removed the second seat from the bow and secured my chair in place with some bungee cords so it would not end up at the bottom of the lake in case we flipped. By not belting and strapping me in, we figured I would fall free of the chair if we tipped over (a not so trivial detail!). A life jacket completed the precautions.



Comfort and confidence levels of my team members were further bolstered when I told them I swim at least 1-1.5 km each week in the pool. The entire paddling team was 'on board' with my participation and assisted with necessary details, the trickiest one getting me in and out of the canoe without tipping, procedures we practiced from both beaches and docks on inland lakes prior to our trip. Add to that the super-cautious decision making by our gouvernail, Mark Crofts, and I was (almost) confidently set for the week-long 150-kilometer adventure.



The two major bay crossings (Batchawana Bay and Goulais Bay) were helped by calm but foggy, drizzly weather. Unfortunately that weather stayed with us until St Joe's island. We survived rain, fog, thick clouds of mosquitoes on shore, a black bear roaming around while we were eating, and a rapidly approaching thunderstorm and downpour which we had to outrun when crossing Lake George. Nonetheless, it was a pretty darn cool experience. I do not often get a chance to test and challenge my limits, which this trip did for sure! It was also fun to participate in the Canada Day celebrations in Sault Ste Marie, going through the locks with hundreds of small vessels, and to contribute to Parks Canada's celebrations at Fort St Joe's by offering rides for kids. We enjoyed the great hospitality of many local folks, feasting us along the way, starting with the Voyageur Cookhouse, and ending with a huge lunch at St Joe's Island and a fantastic picnic in Bruce Mines.



I bet I am the first person to complete a multi-day Voyageur Canoe Brigade trip. So, in our modest way, we made a bit of history while reenacting a piece of Canada's history. Our trip shows that together, with some crazy thinking, a bit of perseverance, and a lot of planning, we can make Canada a more inclusive place to live AND PLAY...

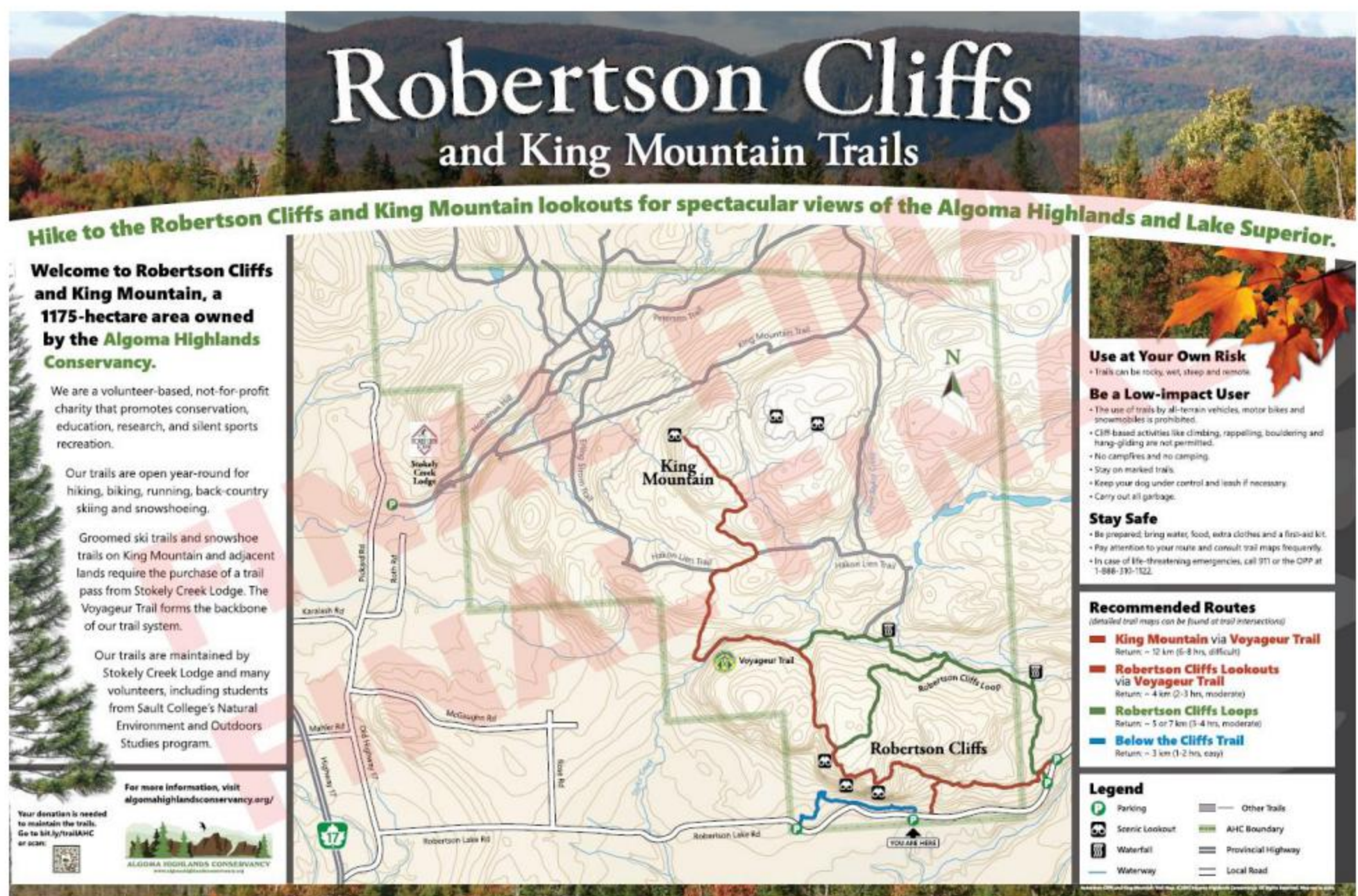
HOW POPULAR ARE THE VTA TRAILS? Just ask our trail counters

Kees van Frankenhuisen

Anyone associated with the Voyageur Trail Association and the Trail does not need convincing that easy access to good hiking trails is important. Trails are the pathways through which we connect with our natural environment, a connection that is crucial to our emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. We know this, but the problem is that decision makers often do not know, or demand hard data. As VTA members, volunteers and Executives, we typically busy ourselves with building, maintaining, and enjoying the trails, and we tend not to concern ourselves with monitoring trail use, besides the odd casual observation that 'the trail is crazy busy today'.

The most popular section of the Voyageur Trail in the Sault Ste Marie area is the Robertson Cliffs trail (see VTA newsletter January 2020 for a detailed overview of this section of the trail). It winds through a pristine and mature maple-yellow birch forest along the edge of a spectacular 400-foot drop off where King Mountain meets the Goulais river floodplain (see trail map in **Figure 1**, below).

Figure 1. Robertson Cliffs and King Mountain Trails Map



The cliffs offer spectacular views across the Goulais river valley onto Lake Superior and beyond, and draw visitors from far and wide, especially when Algoma's famous fall colours are on peak display.



The property was bought by the Algoma Highlands Conservancy in 1994 to preserve its unique beauty and to protect the then recently established peregrine falcons, which now nest on the cliffs every year. The trail was constructed in the mid-1990s but it is only during the past decade that the trail became a popular ‘must-see’ destination for local residents and visitors alike. Postings on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook and various hiking blogs and trail Apps undoubtedly contributed to this spike in popularity.

Baseline Trail Use along the Robertson Cliffs

The onslaught of hikers brought home the need for monitoring and quantifying trail use. In the fall of 2017, the VTA installed a trail camera at the trailhead, which was at that time the only way to access the cliffs trail. The fall of 2017 was beautiful with warm weather extending to the end of October. Trail cam images were collected from early September till late November and analyzed to determine the number of individuals that used the trail. The table and graphs below show the result.

Analysis of images collected between September 2 and November 26 revealed that approximately 3,700 people hiked the trail, including 3,300 adults, almost 400 children and more than 300 dogs (see **Table 1** below). Hiking seems to be more popular among women than men, with the female variety making up 58% of adults that used the trail during the initial observation window.

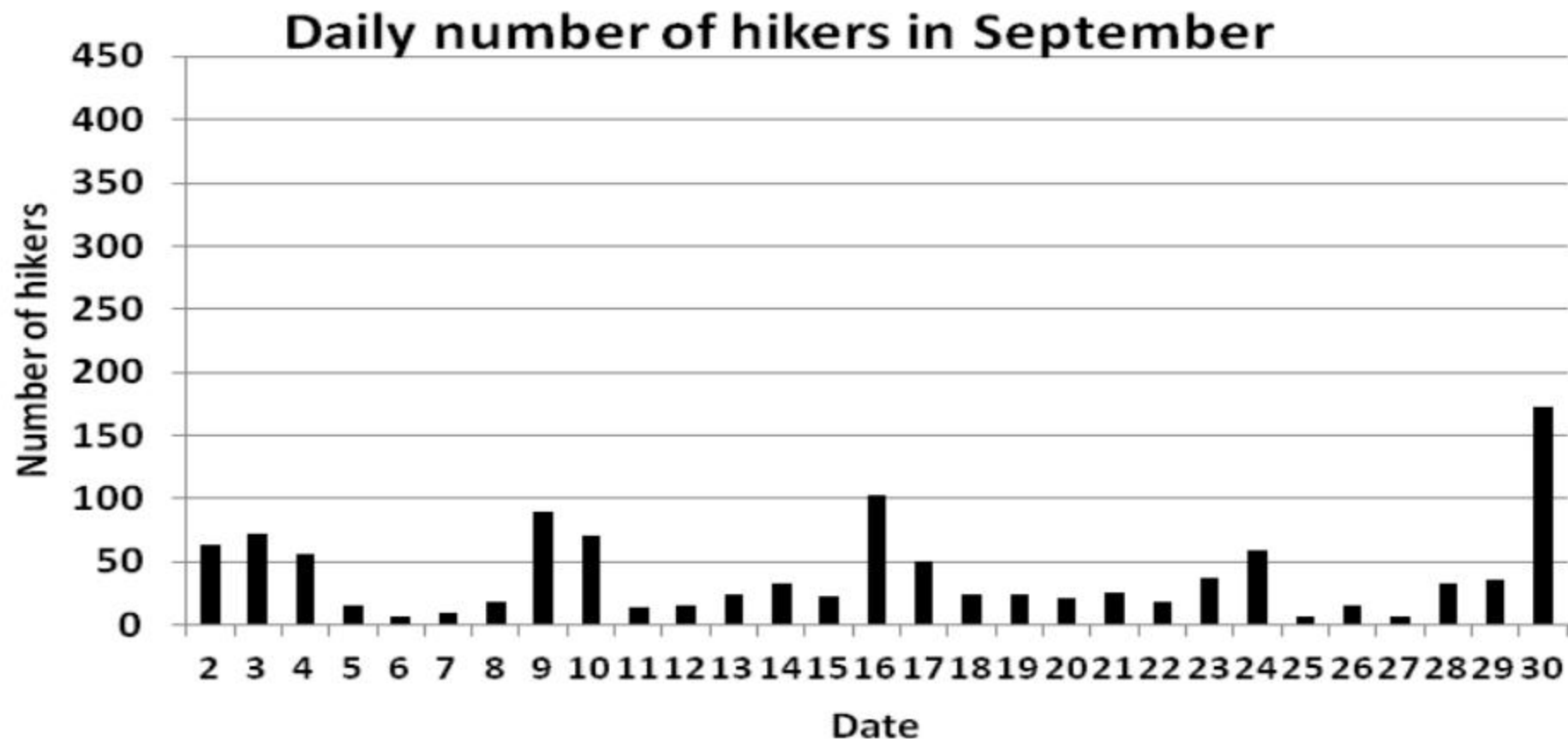
Table 1: Use of the Robertson Cliffs hiking trail in the fall of 2017

Month	No. Hikers	No. Adult	Male	Female	No. Child	No. Infants	No. Dogs
Sept	1141	1019	433	586	102	20	115
Oct	2440	2179	896	1283	225	36	205
Nov	151	146	83	63	2	3	6
Total	3732	3344	1412	1932	329	59	326

Most of the hikers frequented the trail in October, coincident with a late fall colour season and warm weather until late in the month. There were folks on the trail virtually every day in September and October (see **Figure 2** next page).

Daily use started to increase in late September. Peaks in number of hikers coincided, as expected, with the weekends. On the busiest day of the season (Oct 21), more than 400 people were on the trail. Daily use dropped off drastically in November with the advent of poorer weather and the first snow fall, but folks continued to use the trail nonetheless.

Figure 2. Daily Hiker Numbers (September 2017)



Monitoring trail use with trail cameras is very labour intensive, as I found out after staring many hours at thousands of computer images, and not suitable for routine monitoring. The VTA decided to invest in the purchase of three TRAFX infrared trail counters (see **Figure 3** below).



Figure 3. TRAFX Infrared Trail Counter

A scope scans the amount of infrared energy in its field of view and records a significant change from the ambient energy level as a count.

The counts provide an estimate of the number of trail users, not a precise count of individuals, keeping in mind that folks sometime walk in tight groups, or dash back to the car to retrieve a forgotten backpack, or even stand around in front of the counter waiting for others.

I therefore conducted a calibration study in the fall of 2018, deploying both a trail counter and the highly accurate trail camera at the same trail access point.

Unfortunately, I have yet to analyze the results and have not yet come up with an empirically determined correction factor.

Trail Use following the Onset of the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the number of folks using the Robertson Cliffs trails sky rocketed. Curious about trail use during the winter months and associated with the pandemic's increase in outdoor physical activities, I installed a trail counter in early December 2020 at each of three trail access points. One counter monitored use of a newly built 2.5 km loop trail along the base of the cliffs, and the other two were used to monitor use of the Robertson cliffs trail, being installed at the main VTA trailhead and at the head of the Peregrine Trail (a new spur trail that was built to provide a second access point to the Cliffs and King Mountain).

Keeping in mind that most folks would be counted twice (once going in, and again going out), I applied a simple correction factor by dividing the number of counts by two to get an estimate of the number of trail users. **Table 2** shows how popular the Robertson Cliffs trails have become: between December 10 and April 24 an estimated 3700 users enjoyed this segment of the Voyageur Trail system, about the same number previously recorded during peak Fall hiking season in 2017.

Table 2. Estimated Winter 2020 Trail Use along the Robertson Cliffs

Estimated number of users Robertson Cliffs Trails				
Month	Cliff Side	Peregrine Trail	VTA Trailhead	Total
December*	31	61	189	280
January	85	160	434	679
February	129	109	313	551
March	91	391	401	883
April**	150	447	690	1,287
Total	486	1,168	2,027	3,681

* Starting December 10

** Until April 24

The TRAFX trail counters also provide an easy means for more detailed analysis, including opportunities to examine both monthly (Figure 4) and weekly (Figure 4) trail traffic counts (see next page). These figures clearly show the increasing trail traffic associated with the onset of the warmer spring weather with total traffic levels more than doubling in April 2021 compared to December 2020 levels, and traffic on the Peregrine Spur Trail tripling during the same time interval. Weekly analysis also provides interesting insights into local trail use trends – highlighting the peak travel at the end of January 2021, in mid-March 2021 and over the Easter 2021 long weekend.

Counts this fall will provide a direct comparison with 2017. The TRAFX trail counters provide an easy and expedient way to monitor trail use: the counter can be left in place year-round with maybe one battery change and data are easily downloaded on a handheld dock.

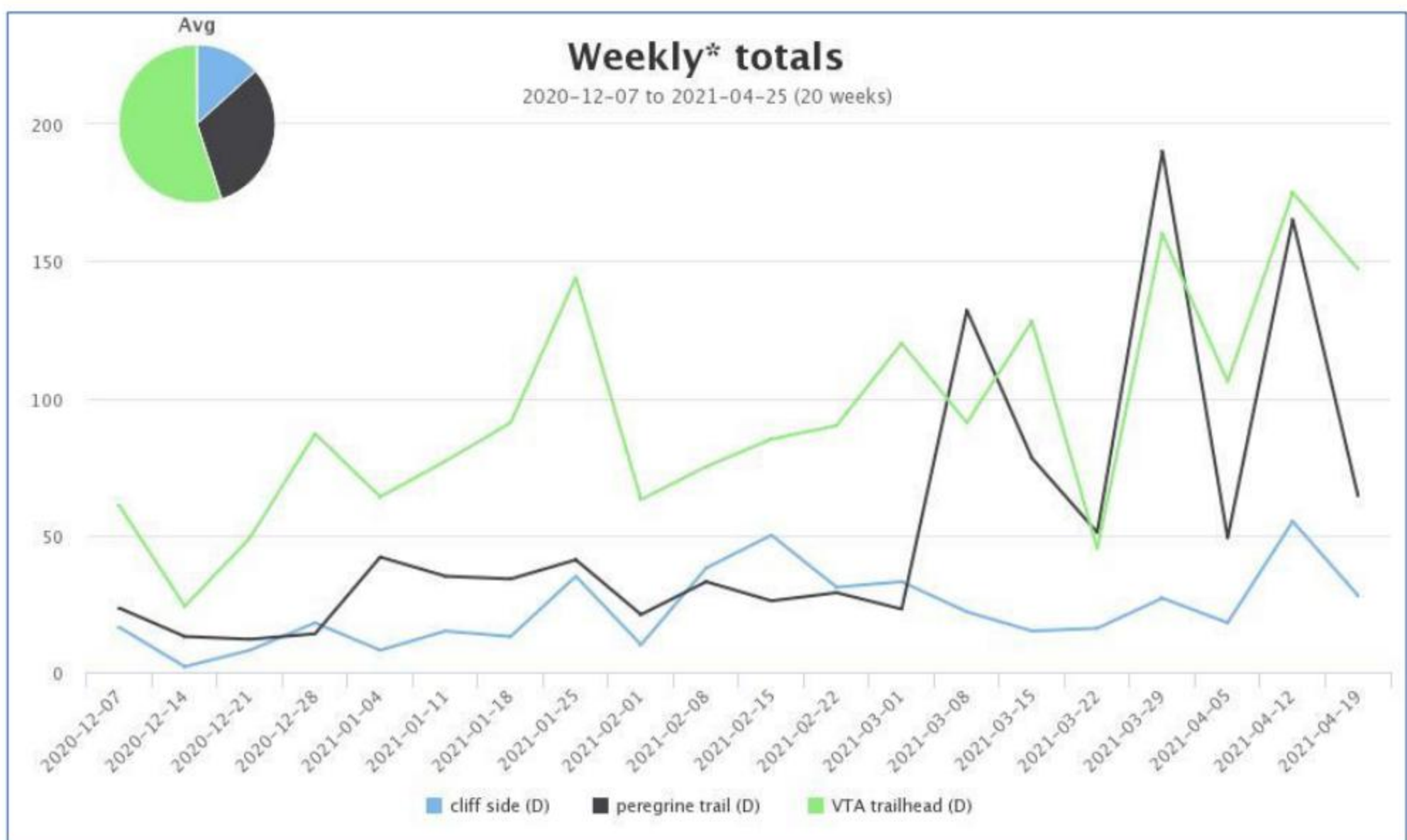
Data are transferred from dock to computer and the proprietary TRAFX software automatically generates specified data summaries as graphs and tables. Monitoring can be done on a continuous basis or during a selected time period each year to compare year-to-year trends. And their use does not generate the same privacy issues that come with trail cameras.

Stay tuned for more data!

Figure 4. Monthly Robertson Cliffs Trail System Traffic



Figure 5. Weekly Robertson Cliffs Trail System Traffic



TRAIL CONDITIONS AND CLOSURES:

Updates from the Trail Master

Doug Elson

Voyageur Trail Association Members and Trail Users along the length of the Voyageur Trail should be aware of the following Spring / Summer Trail Closures, reroutes and repairs. Readers should be aware that this is not a complete list, and trail closures can be subject to change due to weather, or other unforeseen factors.

Huron Shores Trail

Melwel Road at access point 8 - km43.5 for approximately 1km, is rerouted, following new blazes.

Saulteaux Trail

Echo Ridges Section near Upper Echo River

The wash out on the dirt track (signed Moose Trail) has been repaired with 2 iron culverts, once again permitting driving access to A5 at km38.4 at Stuart Creek. High clearance vehicles only should use this.

Aubin Road east to West Davignon Creek Closed

As of [March 30, 2021](#) the Voyageur Trail section between Aubin Road access 5b at km5.4 (off Maki Road) is closed, eastwards to West Davignon Creek at km6.9 (north of Allens Side Road).

The closure is due to the expansion of a gravel pit. We are working on a re-route. Stay tuned.

Harmony Trail

Harmony Lookout

Logging and road development will start [mid May 2021](#) and will involve Harmony A1 through to A2 currently marked as the main

(white blazed) Voyageur Trail. This section of the Voyageur Trail will be closed until further notice. Do not to park at A2 (the first road, east side, north of Highway 17 bridge over the Harmony River) as it will be used as the log haul road.

Goulais Trail

From access point A2 at highway 17 to Jewelweed Loop at km 2.6 is closed permanently.

Michipicoten Trail

Bridget Lake rd. access 7 at km 21 to Noisy Bay access 9 at km 30 is closed until further notice, for much needed maintenance.

Casque Isles Trail

The **Picnic Table Lookout Trail** from the trailhead access point A6 is under construction, the section that is complete is beautiful, but the south end is still a work in progress. Trail is open for use but please make eye contact with any equipment operators before proceeding pass them.

For the most up-to-date trail information, including temporary closures, rerouting information and general trail conditions, visit our social media accounts on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) and checkout our Story Highlithgts.

RESPONSIBLE TRAIL USE AND THE VTA TRAIL USER CODE: Recreating Responsibly to Preserve the Environment and Ensure Continued Trail Access

Kelsey Johansen

Trail use has skyrocketed over the course of the COVID-19 Pandemic, introducing new and inexperienced trail users to trail-based activities like hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and fat biking and increasing the amount of time that established trail users spend on the trail. Following these simple tips ensures safe and responsible trail use, and helps to ensure that the Voyageur Trail remains open for all non-motorized trail users.

Be a Respectful Trail User

The VTA Trail User Code is our commitment to responsible recreation and Leave No Trace Principles. All users of the Voyageur Trail and Member Club's Trails must abide by this code:

1. **Hike Along Marked Routes** – Do not take shortcuts and stay on blazed trails to avoid damaging sensitive ecosystems, including fragile vegetation.
2. **Do not climb fences** – Fences demark private and public land, as well as blocking access to environmental hazards. Stay away from cliffs, steep slopes, and the edge of waterways which may swell due to seasonal flooding, rain and hydroelectric dam releases.
3. **Be Mindful of Landowner Property** – Much of the Voyageur Trail spans private land – avoid trespassing on private properties which can strain valuable landowner relationships and could lead to a request to remove the Trail from their land.
4. **Take Only Pictures, and Leave Only Footprints** – Follow the Leave No Trace Guidelines and pack out what you pack in – this includes toilet paper and litter! For Leave No Trace Hiking Tips, including [How to Poop in the Woods](#), check out this article in the Summer 2020 VTA Newsletter. This also means leaving flowers and plants for others to enjoy and not damaging living trees or stripping off bark. These simple deeds protect the sensitive species and habitats along the Voyageur Trail.
5. **Light Cooking Fires at Official Campsites Only** – and only when permitted under local fire regulations and COVID-19 backcountry travel guidelines. Drench fires after use, or better still, carry a lightweight stove.
6. **Keep Dogs under Control** – Voyageur Trail users should be aware that a 2-meter leash is required in all parks and protected areas and that they should follow local Club's guidelines concerning dogs when not within parks and protected areas.
7. **Protect and Do Not Disturb Wildlife** – Many diverse species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and fish call the natural areas around the Voyageur Trail home. Do not feed wildlife - this ensures they do not become dependent on people. Also, avoid disturbing wildlife by avoid flash photography and maintaining a safe distance from all animals.
8. **Park Safely and Legally** – Parking lots fill up quickly and become congested. Many municipalities are increasing parking fines to control overcrowding, so park legally. Pick a back up destination to avoid parking fines and overcrowding on trails.
9. **Stay Local** - Contact with nature promotes physical and mental health, but as we navigate the COVID-19 Pandemic, do not travel outside your region to hike at this time. Recreating locally means avoiding leaving your Health Unit. This helps reduce the spread of COVID-19 and helps protect smaller communities with less health care resources. So, stay local and check our website and social media for COVID-19 related updates. Remember, the Voyageur Trail spans both the Algoma Public Health and Thunder Bay District Health Units – its best to stay within your local health unit and check their websites for local updates and travel restrictions.

Plan Your Hike and Hike Your Plan

It's always best to be prepared – avoid putting unnecessary strain on emergency services, search and rescue teams, and local authorities by planning your hike and hiking your plan.

You can do this by:

- Checking the capacity limits at your preferred destination and have a backup plan in case your destination is too busy when you arrive. Call ahead or check online for information about current use levels.
- Researching your destination, including downloading a trail app, reviewing the terrain, major features, and know the trail difficulty rating, and ensure your skills match your destination.
 - The beta versions of the VTA's Ondago App maps can now be purchased through our online store.
 - The Voyageur Trail Association uses the Parks Canada trail classification system which ranges from Easy, through Moderate, Difficult, Extremely Difficult to Unrated.
- Telling someone where you are going, and when you plan to be back. Check in with them when you arrive, and when you return home. Give them a copy of the route you plan to take.
- Bringing more water and food than you need. Always over-pack water and food in case you need are stuck in the bush longer than you planned.
- Bringing the 10 Essentials with you - at minimum this includes: navigation equipment (extra batteries and or a printed copy), a head lamp, sun protection, a first aid kit, knife, fire starter, shelter (emergency blanket and light bivy), extra food, extra water and extra clothing. Extra clothing and socks is ESSENTIAL as weather can shift, clothing can get wet, and in spring temperatures can drop after sunset, and
- Bringing a backup communication device such as a personal locator beacon, satellite emergency notification device or satellite phones.

Be COVID-19 Safe

Minimize your exposure risk by hiking within the geographic boundary of your health unit, with no more than 5 people from multiple households (as per the current Reopening Ontario Guidelines) and maintain physical distancing when at trailheads, in parking lots and when passing on the trail. If you can't maintain a 2-meter distance, wear a mask.

Under current guidelines, this also means no carpooling to your hiking destination, and prohibits picnicking and camping on crownlands, in conservation areas and provincial and national parks.

Be aware that many amenities and services, such as flush toilets, potable water, and comfort stations are closed as a result of the pandemic. Prepare for the possibility of having to use drop toilets, and be sure to bring your own supplies (toilet paper and hand sanitizer) as port-a-loos often run out. Also, bring more water than you think you'll need - to drink and to wash up!

Lastly, be sure to bring the 10 Essentials with you. These 10 items of trail gear are essential for all trail users and help to ensure safety on the trails for all hikers, and trail users, no matter your experience level. They include:

1. **Navigation:** map, compass, altimeter, GPS device, personal locator beacon (PLB) or satellite messenger.
2. **Headlamp:** plus extra batteries.
3. **Sun protection:** sunglasses, sun-protective clothes and sunscreen.
4. **First aid kit:** Wilderness first aid kit including foot care, insect repellent and tick removal kit (as needed).
5. **Knife** plus a gear repair kit.
6. **Fire starter:** matches, lighter, tinder and/or stove.
7. **Shelter** carried at all times (can be a light emergency bivy, emergency blanket, etc.).
8. **Extra food:** Beyond the minimum expectation of time and activity.
9. **Extra water:** Beyond the minimum expectation of time and activity (also consider bringing a water treatment system or tablet).
10. **Extra clothes:** Beyond the minimum expectation of time, activity and expected weather.

We hope that with all this great advice you'll have a safe and enjoyable summer hiking season!

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