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Ruminations From the President

I am pleased to present you with the new edition of the VTA Newsletter. It has been a long time since we have produced one, with responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and all that went along with that. It was so refreshing this past season to get back out on the trails with friends and new acquaintances. The VTA Coordinating Council (CC) has been reflecting on our upcoming 50th Anniversary in 2023 and we will have some exciting news to announce in the new year.

While I was on a hike with our dog recently, I was reflecting on what this Association has accomplished in the last 50 years. What began as a small group of like-minded folks in the Sault Ste. Marie area has grown into an organization with trail clubs from Blind River to Nipigon. I am proud to do my part as the current President and everyone that has spent time on the CC in the past can take pride in having steered our Association along the way. The CC often finds itself wrapped up in current business, but maybe we should all reflect on what has been accomplished and appreciate everything that we have achieved. There will always be more tasks in front of us to be looked after, and we will take those on with the same steadfast approach that has been shown by our predecessors to ensure that we will prosper for the next 50 years.

Geographically our Association is quite large, and we are thankful of being part of the digital era where we can have face to face meetings as needed. The CC is cognizant that the demographics of our members is an older group, and we are looking at ways to encourage the next generation to become involved in leading hiking organizations. There are also some legal requirements that we will need to consider soon, such as amending our bylaws to confirm that they are in line with the new Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) which will require compliance by 2024.

In my past life as a volunteer firefighter, I attended a training weekend in Thunder Bay, where the keynote speaker said something that has stayed with me since. He told us that the organization that we were in wasn't ours, it was a gift given to us by our predecessors and that we are meant to take care of and cultivate until it became time for us to pass it along to the next care takers. The past members for the CC have given us a strong foundation for the Association and we pledge to do our best as we move onto the next 50 years.

If you are not a member of the VTA yet, please consider giving us your support. If you can help with trail clearing, we would welcome the opportunity to show off our trails and the places that they take you to. The individual Club contacts and membership information can be found at www.voyageurtrail.ca. I will end by saying thank you to all our members as well.

Purchasing a VTA membership demonstrates your support for the vision and work of the VTA. As a not-for-profit, charitable organization, the VTA depends on donations, volunteers, and membership revenue to support its operations. A paid membership supports trail development and maintenance, guided trail outings, trail news and updates as well as production of Trail Maps.

See you on the trail! ■

– Matt Borutski, VTA President

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Old Woman Bay, Lake Superior Provincial Park

Winter Walking Motivation

By Daphne Syme-Murphy

Having grown up with the Voyageur Trail being a big part of our family life in my younger years, I walked or hiked most of the accessible stretches around Sault Ste. Marie by the time I left for university in the mid-80's. And although I've moved far from northern Ontario and the beautiful landscape the trail passes through, I still make every effort to hike a portion of it when I return home to visit.

Like many others during Covid, it became hard to get out and keep active, with so many activities shut down. Where I live, we were not even permitted to access public land for hiking and walking outdoors, making it especially hard to keep active. Add to that winters on the prairies, where the weather can make it especially hard to get out and enjoy the outdoors, I really struggled to keep active.

It was during the height of Covid that I discovered several companies that offered 'walking challenges.' These can be run, walked, biked, swum, or take any form of activity counting you choose. The gist is you sign up for one and track your progress on an online portal and once complete, the company mails the medal to you. Along the way you can track your milestones and receive updates, digital postcards and information about the areas you have 'travelled through.' The challenges have provided some great motivation to remain active and fun, along with an opportunity to learn about places I'm likely to never visit.

One of the challenges offered is a yearly challenge (e.g. 2022, 2023 coming up) where you choose your distance and once you complete it, you get the medal. I had been contemplating dedicating the 2023 medal to doing the Voyageur Trail. But I discovered that one of the companies (The Conqueror)

is running a contest to choose future challenges. This is a fabulous opportunity – for me, if the Voyageur Trail became an option, I'd get the chance to hike it virtually in addition to the few chances I get when visiting home; for the VTA to promote the trail and increase awareness; and for anyone having a hard time getting out and looking for motivation in the winter months giving them a chance to 'hike' the trail virtually and perhaps see stretches they don't normally get to.

With 2023 being the 50th anniversary of the trail, it would be great to see one of the next expansions of the trail be into the virtual world. Having the trail as a virtual option would give the VTA an opportunity to share and promote to others not blessed to live along the north shore with access to this beautiful countryside, the opportunity to see and explore it. The VTA recently partnered with Ondago to provide online trail maps, so virtual 'access' seems like a natural next step. In the online community for these challenges, it is not uncommon for people to decide to travel to hike a trail they learned of by doing a virtual challenge.



To become a virtual trail option, the trail needs to get through a couple of steps. The first is to get nominated by enough people to get onto the voting round. Once there, enough votes could make it a future virtual challenge. I encourage everyone to consider nominating our trail by visiting 'The Conqueror' website at www.theconqueror.events/suggest-challenge/ and share what you love the most about the trail. You can also see the variety of trails already nominated or as available worldwide virtual challenges you can sign up for. The Voyageur Trail is worthy of being included in this great collection of world adventure trails to hike and explore the beautiful scenery, vistas, and environments it passes through and showcase our beautiful 'backyards.' ■



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Photo credits: Françoise Nadon, Melanie Hall and Jacques Ménard.

Revitalizing PENEWOBIKONG

Renewed interest and revitalization of the Penewobikong section of the Voyageur Trail

By Françoise Nadon

With pandemic restrictions continuing to impact our ability to gather and frequent public places, one thing is certain; there are no restrictions for getting outside. Interest in the Penewobikong section of trail has been rekindled in 2021-2022 with a dedicated group of volunteers and nature enthusiasts engaging Blind River and surrounding locals to get out and experience this hiking gem along the North Shore of Lake Huron.

September saw a small but dedicated group of volunteers clean up sections of the trail and freshen up some of the older and tattered trail blazes. Long time trail member and dedicated volunteer, Andy Penikett, led the effort while providing valuable ecological and historical insights into the trail's landscape.

As fall arrived, there was a steady increase in hiking excursions organized by unofficial hike coordinator and catalyst behind the trail use revival, Melanie Hall. Several trips were coordinated to explore different sections of the trail stemming from Iron Bridge to Melwel Lodge and



Canoe Lake to the Cataract Falls. A bird's eye view was enjoyed while walking on the section of trail that is nestled along Lake Duborne. Walks ranged from an hour or two up to a half day. Many sections of the trail boast old and overgrown blazes, adding character to the experience.

With interest slowly budding, a couple of volunteers have created a Facebook page called the Penewobikong Hiking Group, where members are welcome to coordinate and post hikes while those wishing to enjoy the trails in good company can be informed of upcoming excursions. The group currently has 126 members and is growing steadily. *(continued on page 5)*



Photo credits: Françoise Nadon, Melanie Hall and Jacques Ménard.

(continued from page 4)

Interest has not waned with the colder weather. In fact, the Penewobikong section of trail has welcomed new trail enthusiasts of all ages with participation increasing in number through several snow-shoe outings. You can often find hiking excursions scheduled most weekends. Gatherings are informal and the group will often meet first at the local Tim Hortons parking lot before heading out.

As the pandemic outlook is still uncertain, enthusiasm and interest for the Penewobikong section of the Voyageur Trail is on the upswing. Whether you live in the area or are just planning a visit, the hiking group continues to welcome new members (check out its Facebook page, Penewobikong Hiking Group). The group looks forward to continue enjoying the beauty and splendor of nature while exploring the trail network in its own backyard. ■



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ONDAGO

VTA Development of the Ondago App

By Matt Borutski, VTA president

In 2019, the VTA Coordinating Council agreed that we needed to develop the next edition of our Guidebook. Up to that point, Guidebooks were updated every five to seven years. The update of the Guidebook required many hours of volunteer effort, chasing down trail reroutes, closures and collecting updated information from trail managers across the Association. The task was very time consuming, and we needed to change to a different process. Since the last update, our trail management has adapted to a more modern and responsive model. Our users deserved a more up-to-date Guidebook that reflected timely updates, while letting us relate trail reroutes and closures as they happened.

After careful consideration, we decided to move to a digital app that would be available on mobile devices. The Ondago app was chosen as they had received excellent reviews from other trail managers. Access to the maps on the Ondago app will require you to become a member of the VTA. Memberships that are renewed annually allow us to pass on the most up-to-date revisions of our maps and descriptive text to our members. In our view, while considering our due diligence to our members, this method of updating our members was the best way to proceed. We can also update the maps in the app on a real time basis, enabling our members to have the best and most current information at hand to plan and execute an outing on our trails.

We anticipated resistance to this move, as many users distrusted how the digital presence would work on the trail and many others would prefer

to have a paper map in their hands. We can respond to both of these issues.

Every Club in our Association has spent hours entering their data into the Ondago app. There isn't a better resource to do this than local trail managers, who have their feet on the ground. The exact GPS track of every trail has been vetted by these managers, and on-ground adjustments have been made where necessary to the maps. The Points of Interest (POI's) have been moved to better reflect exactly where they are on the trail, and some redundant POI's have been deleted while others have been added. Beta versions of the app were released to trail managers and tested in the field. You can be confident that if you drop out of data coverage, the app will find your location if your location access is turned on. Saying that, if you encounter any issues with the app, please pass those along to the local trail Club or send a detailed message to info@voyageurtrail.ca.



Harmony-Stokely Section – Robertson Loop Trail

We also discussed at length how to get printed maps into the hands of our users. The VTA firmly believes that, for safety's sake, that every hiker should have access to a map to use while hiking on any trail. Every year there is a change to a trail somewhere. Printed maps can quickly become out of date, and when you

consider our past practice of updating the Guidebook every five to seven years, the maps that were provided in the Guidebook could be wrong in many instances. It could be that a trail has been rerouted or, more importantly, a landowner may have asked for a change or closure to a piece of trail that crosses their property. We know that a printed map is desirable to have in your hand if your mobile device breaks down while hiking. An added benefit of your membership is the ability to log into the site and download pdf maps of our trails, and these maps can be printed at your convenience. We are committed to having every trail in the Association having a pdf map available in the next revision.

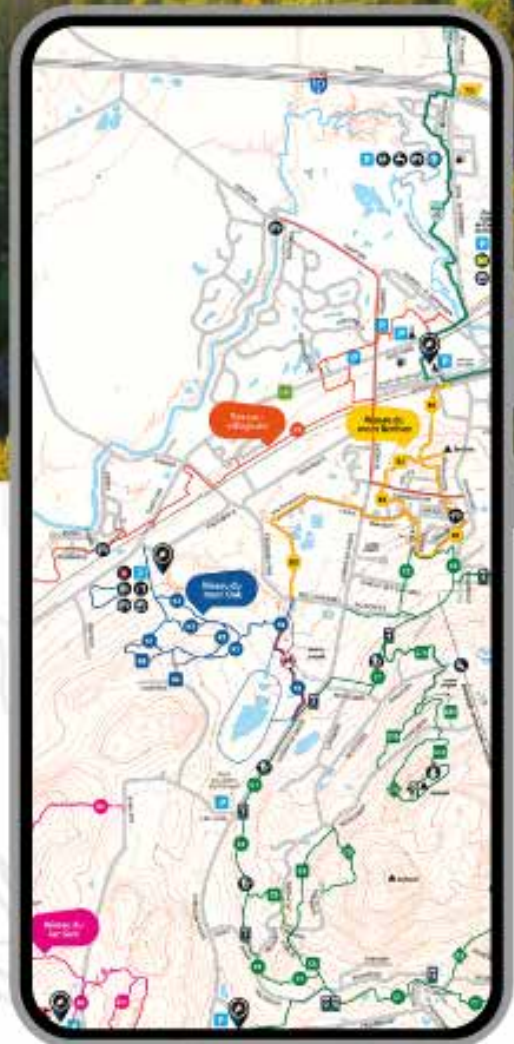
You can purchase your annual membership on our site at www.voyageurtrail.ca/memberships. You will receive information on how to download our maps on the Ondago app, available on Google Play and the Apple App Store. We congratulate you on becoming a member of the VTA! Purchasing a VTA membership demonstrates your support for the vision and work of the VTA. As a not-for-profit, charitable organization, the VTA depends on donations, volunteers, and membership revenue to support its operations. A paid membership supports trail development and maintenance, guided trail outings, trail news and updates as well as production of Trail Maps. Members have access to all trail map products, 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 500+ km (and growing) hiking trail through some of Ontario's most splendid wilderness.

Lastly, consider becoming involved with a local Club. We need volunteers across the Association, especially when the trail needs clearing in the spring. You will not require any specific experience with the tools that are used, training will be provided by hike leaders. Even if you can only give us a day or a few hours, every bit counts. Find the contact for your local Club here www.voyageurtrail.ca/clubs. I hope to meet you on the trail some day! ■



ONDAGO

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Don't "Should" Yourself

By Deana Renaud, 'Getting Lost on The 49th' Blogger

Don't "should" yourself.

Sometimes I sit at my kitchen table to watch the sun come up. Bright rays illuminate the long, tangled, grass in my yard. Dew sparkling on overgrown blades like emeralds. Warm amber light creeps into my window and reflects the nose smudges left by my wild hounds pressing their faces onto the glass in the hopes of catching the attention of the groundhogs outside.

As I sip my coffee, I notice a few dishes in the sink and a pile of laundry on the floor sprinkled delicately with dog fur. I start to hear email notifications and the familiar 'ding' of social media come from my phone and I flip the switch to silent.

Turning back to my coffee, I see the steam gently dance over the creamy caramel surface. The smell rising, I inhale the delicious aroma, deep and comforting. I pull my favourite mug up to my lips and indulge. The things I should accomplish today start to roll around in my head and I can feel the wheel of life start to turn.

I hear Beaver roll out of bed and see him peek his head out from his bedroom door.

"Morning Mama, what do you want to do today?"

The question that changes everything.

The question that takes me from the "musts", "ought to" and "shoulds" and sparks something deep inside. The ignition of excitement, desire for peace, building of wonder and the possibility of adventure.

The question that leads us to paddling sun-soaked surfaces, scrambling up rock faces to beautiful waterfalls, flying down trails on our dirt bikes, or exploring new places in the wilderness. The question that trumps housework, the need to respond to technology and that allows the grass to grow ... un-mowed.

There have been times in my life where I felt conflicted by the things I should be doing versus what I actually needed for my body, mind and soul. The reality is, there is always going to be laundry, dishes, conflicts to resolve, emails to answer and likes to make on Instagram. This unending stream of "shoulds" forced me to approach life differently. It was the realization that I needed to balance out work load and selfcare, find the value in creating meaningful experiences and not use "should" as a barrier to the things I need.

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Pukaskwa National Park – Land of The Anishnaabe (Ojibway) of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg

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Easily said when we have to actually live a real life though, isn't it? The struggle is real when sitting back examining true balance. Everyone's "should" show looks different. Our responsibilities, tasks, chores and needs are determined by evolving and complex factors. There are times in our life where we are in deep should, other times we are up should creek without a paddle, and then there are times where our should isn't overwhelming or consuming.

It is not necessarily the nature of our shoulds that causes stress, despair and isolation. It is the pressure or the constipation, if you will, that we associate with it that is the significant issue.

In my efforts to manage my "shoulds" here are some helpful things that have worked the best for me:

Something good every day.

You need to bring yourself back to center every day. This doesn't mean you have to do a 20-mile canoe trip, or hike to the top of a mountain. But if outside is where you find your balance, calm, fun or peace. Get out. Go for a nature walk on your lunch break, take your coffee down to the lake before work, beach day on a Wednesday, or read to your kids in the grass on your front lawn. This is true for any activity that gives you 'good' in your life. Music, painting, creating, learning, culture, fixing, exercise. Make it happen for yourself, even if it's for 15 minutes. These bright spots allow us to harness positivity and recharge the energy bank that we expel every day with work, family, conflict, stress and "shoulds."

“

The reality is, there is always going to be laundry, dishes, conflicts to resolve, emails to answer and likes to make on Instagram.

Should before breakfast.

My "if I had a dollar every time someone asked me..." question is: "Wow! How do you find the time to do all of your adventuring?" Which, by the way, really annoyed me in the beginning. Likely because sometimes this question is saturated with judgement and preceded with the comment "It must be nice." With deeper understanding, I think that the judgement, is connected to the desire for others to want more space in

their life to do the things they love, and to not feel so much undue pressure from the "shoulds." So, after careful consideration and self reflection, there are a few elements to my answer.

The first thing is that it is my priority. I make it happen because it is at the top of my mind, and I (selfishly at times) push away other things to make it happen.

The second is a little bit of a trifecta: accessibility, privilege, and luck. I am fortunate enough to live in one of the most amazing places in the world. I can throw my canoe on my car and be on Lake Superior

in 10 minutes from driveway to lakeshore. I am able bodied and privileged to have the resources, and financial stability to make balance a priority. I fully acknowledge that there are a lot of people who just try to survive a day, and I am grateful that I have the opportunity to live the life I do.

Finally, I put the work in. I wake up early, especially on weekends, to get my "shoulds" out of the way. Also, I am 100 percent fine with a certain level of messy.

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Matt Borutski assisting with brush clearing at the Discovery Center in Schreiber.

Hiking With a Partner(ship)

By Matt Borutski

As a Trail Manager on the Casque Isles Section of the VTA, I am constantly considering how to improve the paths that we maintain. There are so many variables to consider; footbridges to keep feet dry, markers and signage to ensure that users stay on track while trying to retain the true character of a wilderness recreational trail, to name a few. Our Club was first organised in 1975 or 1976 and has been a fixture in the region since.

One of the ways that the Casque Isles approaches trail management has been to create and maintain partnerships. The primary relationship should always be with the local communities that are close to the trail. Every municipality is interested in Economic Development and promoting the health of their residents in recreational activities. Trails, whatever their classification, fit into both categories. Sometimes a trail group will need to show a city or municipality that they exist, but most times you will find some extremely interested parties. We have had a tremendous relationship with Terrace Bay, Schreiber and Rossport over the years. From sitting down to discuss trail development, to creating a Strategic Plan, to writing grant applications and

providing in-kind contributions, we are constantly in contact and the work that we put into the trail never goes unnoticed.

Perhaps all you need is promotion for your trail or to educate the public that it exists. I meet many long-time residents of our area who have told me that they never knew that the Casque Isles Trail even existed or had never considered walking on it. And you can bet that I use every one of these opportunities to talk about how important being a member of the VTA is to our continued existence, and to share the virtues of the Ondago app and pdf maps.

We are constantly in search of and cultivate our other partnerships as well.

- The Superior North Community Futures Development Corporation (CFDC), their mission is to actively support and stimulate economic growth and diversification in the region.
- We are a member of Ontario's Superior Country, the regional Destination Marketing Organization (DMO). The annual fee

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for membership is about \$300 and the return is promotion on their website, further partnerships with other entities by pooling funds together, and the creation of promotional videos.

- We have been a partner with Parks Canada within the Lake Superior National Marine Conservation Area (LSNMCA) for many years. This has developed into a Membership of Understanding (MOU) that will frame the relationship for years to come. There is a promotional value to the partnership, and they have aided with map creation and trail building expertise in the past.
- Our relationship with Trans Canada Trail (TCT) has been beneficial for us. From trailhead development, markers and signage, promotion and funding opportunities, this is a partnership that has paid many dividends for us.
- The Ontario Trillium Foundation and Fed Nor have both financed projects for us in the past, which Terrace Bay and Schreiber have graciously agreed to administer for us.
- We have worked closely with Ontario Parks, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) and the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (MNDMNR) in maintaining our trail in the region's Parks and Conservation Reserves, as well as developing campsites along the trail.

We have trailhead signs in all three communities here as well. The Casque Isles Trail is featured prominently in the tourism plans of each community. As a local asset, the Casque Isles Club has a seat on the Terrace Bay Municipal Accommodation Tax committee. At local festivals and vendor shows we will offer a guided hike or put up an information table.



One of the many spectacular views from the Casque Isles Trail.

All of this can add to the workload of the Club executive, but the dividends that received back are utterly worth the time and effort. If you consider the time put in as leveraging, the return back is tremendous. I have committed to raising the profile of the VTA across the Association in my term as President, and I ensure that everyone knows how the Casque Isles relationship and partnership with the VTA works to our benefit. For us here locally the VTA has been a valued partner for many years, and the Casque Isles will celebrate our 50th Anniversary soon as well.

I see the value in every one of these partnerships and sometimes not a week goes by where I am not on the phone or emailing someone. The level to which a local Club engages in a partnership is up to them. Personally, I would urge any of our Clubs to begin the process. ■

– Matt Borutski

VTA President and Casque Isles President

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Like I said, there is ALWAYS going to be laundry and dishes. I am OK with throwing my covers off and leaving an un-made bed in my wake to head out to hike with my dogs.

Step away from the screen.

I rarely watch TV, mainly because my ADHD is overwhelming, and hates sitting for any length of time. I love social media and the connections I make from it; I post lots, but don't scroll for hours. I set limitations on my screen time and will usually allocate time at the end of the day for a Netflix show or a 30-minute Insta reel binge.

In the past, screens occupied a lot of my time and energy, especially social media. It seemed like a good place to put my energy when I needed to disconnect from my life or relieve stress. But overuse made me feel negative and un-productive. If I need a sit still, or to reduce stress, I start reading, writing, edit photographs or pick up my guitar. I engage in something meaningful rather than check out and virtually disconnect.

Time suckers. Find them. Destroy them.

What are the unnecessary, stressful or meaningless activates you get stuck in? (active conflict, toxic people, anxiety, scrolling through Facebook, falling into the YouTube vortex, the never ending conundrum of "what am I going to make for dinner?"). Some of these time suckers are easy to address and others can be bigger issues. How can you work to fix them? How can you create more time, energy and space for the things that matter? If you are struggling with anxiety, can you access therapy and supportive resources so that it doesn't occupy so much of your head space? Can you make changes at the onset of a should? Put a little work into yourself so that you have more energy for the things that bring you joy. Can you plan better to create space in your life? What are the "shoulds" you can get help with? (a great example here is meal planning and meal prep to reduce the time you spend in the kitchen).



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Deana Renaud, blogger, near Nipigon, Ontario.

Find YOUR passion.

None of this works if you aren't getting joy from the activities you are doing. So many people make the mistake of turning joy into a "should." If you hate the gym, running, hiking, or trying to learn a new language, don't put your energy into it. Find the things that genuinely ignite your passion, not things you are told you should like, or feel you should like because your partner/friend does. Find it for yourself first and then seek out others to share in those meaningful experiences.

Navigating the "shoulds" of life is not an easy task. Despite all my greatest efforts and desires to live a life without them, occasionally they are a necessity. Eventually you are going to need clean underwear or go to work to be able to afford to live (or eat ... seriously. Can you believe the post-COVID cost of groceries? Holy. Should.). You need to find a way to manage these responsibilities, so you don't end up "shoulding" yourself.

It might involve planning, prioritizing or the radical acceptance that it is OK to have a messy house. However, the balance you seek in the midst of that is what is important. Create space for experiences that are valuable, produce joy and ignite passion and do this with intention. So, the next time you are sitting with your morning coffee in the sunshine looking into the day, acknowledge the pressure of the things you should be doing. Don't bull should yourself and think about what you actually need. ■

Reprinted with permission from the Getting Lost on The 49th blog by Deana Renaud. I am an adventurer at heart and a mental health professional by trade, living, working, and wandering in Nipigon, Ontario. I hold a master's degree in social work and love enjoying everything outside on the Northwestern shore of Lake Superior and beyond. I thrive on new experiences, building connections with interesting humans, hanging out with my son "Beaver," strong coffee, and sugary carbs. If I'm not outside, you are most likely to find my face buried in a good book and a mouth full of dark chocolate.

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

Be a low-impact hiker!

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



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Visit our website at: www.voyageurtrail.ca

Your articles and photos are welcome! Articles may be edited due to space constraints. Submissions deadline for our Spring 2023 Newsletter is April 30, 2023.

Mail to: Steve Dominy, c/o
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Articles in this newsletter may be copied if credit is given to the Voyageur Trail Association.

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

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



VTA Photo Gallery

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

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



Group of Seven Section – Peninsula Hill Trail



*Nor'wester (Nipigon) Section –
Mazukama Falls*



Desbarats-Huron Shores Section



Penewobikong Section – Fire Tower Lookout

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