



VOYAGEUR TRAIL NEWS

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OFFICIAL OPENING: ECHO RIDGES SECTION, OCT. 5, 1980

Sault Star Photo

OPENING OF THE ECHO RIDGES SECTION

Ontario Hiking Day, 1980, Sunday October 5, was celebrated by the Echo Ridges Voyageur Trail Club in a grand manner. On this day, at the delightful park by Tower Lake, the eastern terminus of the Echo Ridges Section, forty people gathered to witness a trail opening ceremony of some significance. It was a beautiful sunny day for the event and the Honourable Bud Wildman, M.P.P. Algoma, officiated by cutting a pole held by Barry Hansen, President of the Echo Ridges Voyageur Trail Club and Paul Syme, V.T.A. President. The pole was cut with a pair of long-handled trail-clearing shears and this signified the opening of a link that completed about 200 km of continuous trail from 16 km north of Gros Cap on Lake Superior to the town of Iron Bridge.

After the ceremony, the group of spectators were led along the trail which winds around the edge of Tower Lake through some mixed forest with huge hemlock trees, before heading north again. Stumps and some butt logs of an earlier logging era lie alongside the trail, mute evidence of the logging activities of the past. The trail winds its way through some very rugged terrain (hence the name Echo Ridges), past numerous inland lakes and streams, notably Two Horse and One Horse Lakes, and the falls of the Coffee Creek. It parallels the Echo River to its entry into Echo Lake and proceeds westerly under an awe-inspiring bluff on the north shore of Echo Lake. Heading north again, the trail hugs a beautiful valley side and winds through mixed hardwood stands to Whabunose Lake where it again veers west.

It follows the south-east bank of the Garden River downstream into the Garden River Indian Reserve, then crosses a sandy outwash plain. Fire-blackened White Pine stumps with eight-foot buttress roots dot this landscape which ends at High Dump, 30 metres or more above the Garden River. From here in the earlier days, logs were dumped into the Garden River to be driven downstream during the spring flood. From here to-day, a most spectacular view of the river valley and adjacent hills can be had. The Garden River is crossed on a Bailey Bridge within the Reserve and the trail follows the much more rugged north-west bank of the Garden River out of the Reserve. Spectacular gorges and waterfalls of Bedore Creek are passed, and then, westward ho! through Duncan Township, past Driving Lake, Driving Creek, Maude, Ann, and Mable Lakes at the western terminus. In all, a most scenic and rugged section of the Voyageur Trail.

Although no one actually hiked the entire section, the sunny day, warm weather and fall colours all helped to brighten the day for those who attended this official opening and made it an enjoyable outing on the Echo Ridges Section of the Voyageur Trail.

THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE VOYAGEUR TRAIL ASSOCIATION

1980

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Ladies and gentlemen, members and guests, I'd like to tell you about what has transpired in the last year as it relates to the Voyageur Trail Association and the Voyageur Trail.

As you are aware now from the film we have just seen, the Ministry of the Attorney General of Ontario has brought into effect new legislation that helps to protect landowners and their property. The Occupiers' Liability Act especially, assumes that those who take their recreation on most rural land without paying a fee (that's you, the hiker!) will take care of their own safety, and consequently, this Act is of strong assistance in dealing with landowners, present and future.

Our trail and others in the province, depend for their very existence on the goodwill of public-spirited landowners who allow us and others to freely enjoy the beauties of nature on their property. We, the hiking fraternity, have fought for many years, mostly through the Ontario Trails Council and the Federation of Ontario Hiking Trail Associations, to bring this about. We look upon this legislation as only justly due to our landowners for their kindness, and welcome its advent.

On the Victoria Day weekend, the Federation of Ontario Hiking Trail Associations sponsored the first-ever Ontario Hikers' Conference, Hike Ontario!, at Trent University, Peterborough. The Conference was a grand success with more than 400 in attendance, and of those, 6 were Voyageur Trail members from northern Ontario. I feel it is highly commendable that we had even that number of dedicated hikers from so far away. We participated in several of the workshops and study sessions. In a nutshell, the Conference called for more hiker activity in promoting volunteer action and gaining government support for hiking trails, but in addition, all those that I talked with during the Conference, confessed that they were thoroughly enjoying themselves, meeting and socializing with new friends and faces, all with a common interest - hiking and trails! In that sense alone, Hike Ontario! was a resounding success.

Part of the Conference was a gallery of displays mounted by the various clubs. A comment was made in the opening address that perhaps it was appropriate that the (potentially) longest trail in the province had the largest display! That, of course was the V.T.A. display, built under the direction of Bob Andrews. It was a great success, drawing favourable comments and enquiries from many. Now that we have this lovely display, we need to use it to generate more interest in the Voyageur Trail.

Although we are holding our own in membership, we must grow, for the Voyageur Trail must grow if we are to achieve our objectives. I will remind you again, for it is often in my mind, and I believe that repetition helps to strengthen intentions, that word of mouth is our strongest tool in recruiting new members. It is your enthusiasm for and dedication to this idea of a foot-path across northern Ontario that will capture the hearts and minds of the people you associate with. We constantly need your help in recruiting new members. Some of our more recent members have been outstanding in their eagerness to help and contribute towards our goals.

To help you to convince others that we have something worthwhile going, and for your own gratification, I'd like you to know that we have in the past year or so received very complimentary reports on the Voyageur Trail from non-members and users who have come from afar to walk on it. They range from comments on the beauty of the landscape to appreciative remarks about how well the Voyageur Trail is marked and maintained. You are to be congratulated!

Finally, I'd like to report on the physical progress of the Voyageur Trail. Some clubs have done some re-routing and upgrading of the trail in their sections and although this doesn't appear as major extensions of the Voyageur Trail, it does improve the quality of the trail, and needless to say, the resulting experience of the user, and that is an important part of our goals.

The major physical advance made within the last year, and the reason for holding our Annual General Meeting here in Echo Bay, was the completion of the clearing of the Echo Ridges Section. This section was officially opened on October 5, 1980, Ontario Hiking Day, by the Honourable Bud Wildman, M.P.P. Algoma, completing the link that opens 200 km of continuous trail from 16 km north of Gros Cap, west of Sault Ste. Marie, to the town of Iron Bridge, including the Saulteaux, Echo Ridges, Desbarats and Thessalon Sections. My congratulations and thanks to all of you who have helped to bring this about. It is a significant step in our growth and puts us into the league of long trails.

I am sure that it is with the complete concurrence of the Executive and Board that I extend sincerest thanks to all our members everywhere, who have helped in so many ways to further our objectives in creating and promoting the Voyageur Trail - the hiking trail across northern Ontario!

---Paul D. Syme