

FALL 2023 | Issue #135

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# Ruminations From the President

elcome to the Fall 2023 edition of the VTA Newsletter!
Although maintenance work continues in some sections of the Association, we are quickly moving into the season where crampons and snowshoes are needed for our outdoor adventures. Most of us will be giving our favourite winter trails one more pass before the snow shows up. Winter is a lovely time to be in the woods and is a good time to show off your VTA toques and buffs!

It has been a fantastic summer season for hiking. I managed to hike with the Penewobikong and Saulteaux Clubs, along with a well-attended hike at our AGM. I thoroughly enjoy hiking and chatting with other Clubs, as I use these times to learn about the successes and challenges that each group inevitably faces. I appreciate my time in different types of forest from what I am used to up here on the Casque Isles section.

As Directors of the VTA Coordinating Council, we cannot show enough appreciation for our members who keep our trails in good shape. We know that the work is not always easy, but without your help these trails would certainly disappear within a few years. Of course, we follow in the footprints of many others, and we have been walking these paths for half a century in some places. I urge everyone to take a pair of loppers with them, or just to remove fallen branches from the trail you are hiking on. If you do maintenance like this, please let the Club President know and your time will be entered into our maintenance logs, available to our members on the VTA website.

We met in person at our AGM for the first time since Covid-19 came into our lives. We enjoyed our visit to the Sault, and it was great to meet many of you in person. A highlight for me was meeting Dieter and Erika Ropke. Dieter is the last surviving member of the original five who started the VTA and was our Treasurer for over 30 years and, up until a few years ago, they both continued to maintain 10 km of trail in the Desbarats Section. Talk about setting the bar high! As we celebrate our 50th Anniversary, we should ensure that we don't lose an appreciation of those who came before us.

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



Marking a side trail on the Saulteaux section.

that they take you to. The individual Club contacts and our membership information can be found at www.voyageurtrail.ca.

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!



Group of Seven Trail Staff at Pic Island. Photo submitted by Justyce Regular.

# **Tourism increases on the Group of Seven Trail**

By Justyce Regular

The Group of Seven Trail located in Marathon, Ontario has seen an increase in tourism to the area this season. The trail offices saw a major increase in users seeking information with visitors from Hamilton, the Greater Toronto Area, Barrie, Orillia, Dryden, across Northern Ontario from Thunder Bay to Muskoka, Alberta, Minneapolis, Minnesota, Texas, Chicago, and even France.



Pebble Beach in Marathon, Ontario. Photo credit: Mary Katherine Keown. (@mkkeown on IG)

The local museum, Marathon and District Historical Society, – a partner of the Group of Seven Trail – saw more than 460 visitors internationally, including visitors from Canada, the US, France and Ireland. Although these visitors did not directly visit our offices, many sought out Group of Seven and trail information from the museum directly.

The Interpretive Assistant stated that "more than half of the museum visitors had mentioned visiting the Group of Seven Trail while in the area." In previous years, the office saw a maximum of ten visitors, despite trail traffic being high. The need for more information and the desire to stay for longer periods of time has greatly increased. Many of these groups booked several days to a full week's vacation with plans to hike and explore the Marathon area.

The trail also saw a great number of artists this year. Many came specifically to Marathon to stand where the Group of Seven stood and to paint where they painted. Approximately five artists came and painted while hiking the Group of Seven Trail this summer. Many artists found the Group of Seven Trail through social media and accessing the website and are making plans to return in the future. The Group of Seven Trail staff and Board of Directors look forward to seeing more visitors in 2024.



Left to right: Carolyn Reid, Andy Penikett,



Left to right: Melanie Hall, Carolyn Reid, Andy Penikett, Dan Berthelot.

### **Steve Taylor Volunteer of the Year Award** Andy Penikett is this year's recipient

The Voyageur Trail Association awarded its Steve Taylor "Volunteer of the Year Award" to Andy Penikett on May 23, 2023.

The Penewobikong Hiking Group nominated Andy for his commitment and dedication as their local Trail Captain. Andy leads the trail maintenance efforts and until recently, had undertaken this task with only a handful of individuals. For more than 25 years, Andy has led, prioritized, and undertaken all efforts to keep the 45 km section of trail clear so that the community and interested hikers could enjoy. Andy takes pride in the Penewobikong section and has shared stories about the history of hiking in Blind River. Congratulations on a well-deserved award.



# **Laird Signs Appreciation**

Laird Signs, located in Iron Bridge, recently donated a box of pre-cut trail blazes to Andy Penikett from the Penewobikong Section. These were cut from leftover material from Laird's sign making process. Thank you, Laird Signs!

These markers will be put to good use to keep the hiking public on the right path.



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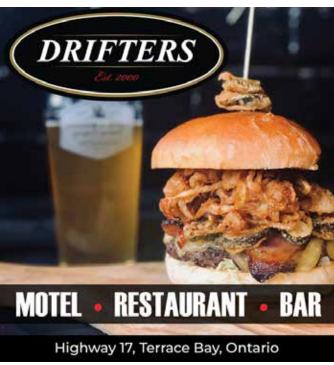
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Map detail on the Ondago app.

# **Ondago App Review**



Work continues behind the scenes on the Ondago App product, maps and GPX tracks that are available to our members. After an update to the App, an issue was noticed with

Android users which we announced to the membership by email and on social media. Steve Dominy, our trail maps co-ordinator, figured out a work-around for the bug, and Ondago had the issue fixed in a short period of time.

We count on our members to point out issues with our products. A hiker on the Casque Isles notified us that the GPX shape files that are available online were almost unusable. While Steve's devices showed the tracks perfectly, when they were downloaded to Matt Borutski's devices the issue quickly became apparent. Steve went to work and has fixed the shape file so that it presents correctly in computer programs and on devices.

Steve also continues to work on getting all our trails available as PDF files from the website. You may have noticed that the PDF maps of the Nor'wester Club trails are now posted to our site. These maps are a benefit of being a VTA member. Having a printed map while on a hike was one thing that our membership requested as we transitioned from a printed Guidebook to having our information available digitally on the Ondago App.

As the App continues to develop, we could use your help too! We are responding to issues as they are reported to us, and as you use the app you may notice that some of the POI's may not have photos. That's where you can help. Take photos of your favourite lookouts, waterfalls, and such. Touch the POI icon on the app and screenshot that, then send both the photo and screenshot to info@voyageurtrail.ca. Make sure to include a brief description of the location and say hello to Steve while you are at it. Your photo may make it into the next annual revision!

Thank you, Steve Dominy and the Ondago team, for all your work in making our product the best it can be! ■









# The Trail Masters

### Dunn Farm Road / Melwel Road Area Trail Maintenance - October, 2023

By Mark Crofts, VTA Vice-President Central

Dechero, micro-burst, tornado, gale. These are meteorological terms not normally heard in hiking circles, yet they are terms that strike fear in the hearts of those who form hiking associations and whose mandate includes keeping hiking trails hikeable.

In mere minutes these fantastic forces of nature transform a trail, on which much time and energy has previously been expended to bring it to a passable condition, into a giants' game of pick-up sticks ... and the Trail Masters job begins a-new. The Trail Master is reminded that they are not the master of anything at all, rather they are at the mercy of the wind gods.

Such was the condition of the VT north of the Dunn Farm Road (Basswood Lake area, Huron Shores Section). Trees, MANY trees, had been toppled, their roots peeled from the rocky ground like we might start the process of flipping an egg in a fry pan.

Into this tangle went 17 VTA members and friends bearing bow saws, loppers and hammers. Slowly but surely, and with the occasional whir of a chainsaw, the treadway of the VT was renewed and blazes re-configured such that trail was hikeable once again.

It all sounds like real work doesn't it? True, but as always happens on excursions

into the bush, our work was rewarded and enriched with shared stories, laughs and a hearty lunch. An aged moose skull, a mysterious earthen foundation and so many plants were the topics of discussions and speculations.

The meteorological gods favoured us with perfect late fall weather....no decheros!

My very rough math says that over the two days about 170 hours of volunteer time were spent driving/cutting/pruning/ hiking in order to bring this section of trail back into shape.

So, the next time someone asks you what the Voyageur Trail Association does ...



e began planning for the AGM in the spring of 2023. It made sense to have our first in-person meeting after Covid-19 restrictions were eased in Sault Ste. Marie, where most of our members reside. The Saulteaux Club agreed to host the event and we chose the Crimson Ridge Golf Course and Embers on the Ridge Restaurant as the venue. As a landowner, Crimson Ridge allows the Nettleton Lake – Root River Segment and the Crimson Ridge Loop to cross their property, and we showed our appreciation to them by having our event at their facility.

We began the day with a guided hike on the Crimson Ridge Loop, led by Saulteaux President Mark Crofts and swept by VTA and Casque Isles President Matt Borutski. The hike was a leisurely-paced 4 km outing, through stands of oak, birch, and maple. One highlight was the view from the 18th tee of the golf course – what a fantastic placement for the golfers and hikers! The forecast called for cloudy and cool conditions, but the sun broke through and provided us with a very nice late

October afternoon. The Casque Isles group seemed the most appreciative, getting down to shirt sleeves for the hike!

After a short welcome at Embers on the Ridge, 40 or so attendees were treated to a dynamic presentation by Physiotherapist André Riopel, who had us out of our seats to show us how to properly stretch and "juice the joints" to avoid hiking injuries. He also related that, as hikers, we are already doing wonders for ourselves physically.

A delicious dinner was served by the capable staff of Embers, and desserts were provided by members of the Saulteaux Club, with special cookies delivered by the President from Breeze Bakery and Café in Schreiber.

We were a bit late getting the meeting started, but no one seemed to mind that much. The Association was represented very well, with members of the Casque Isles, Group of Seven,

(continued on page 7)



This year's Annual General Meeting began with a guided hike on the Crimson Ridge Loop, led by Saulteaux President Mark Crofts and swept by VTA and Casque Isles President Matt Borutski.

(continued from page 6)

Michipicoten and Saulteaux Clubs in attendance, and the Penewobikong Club being represented on the Zoom meeting link.

The regular business of an AGM followed, with reports from the President and Treasurer. We conducted elections for open Director positions, with Brittany Soltys accepting the position as Recording Secretary. Many past Directors stayed on for the next term as well, and we are appreciative for all who have agreed to take on roles in the Coordinating Council.

As a matter of order, we read into the formal record a motion that was passed prior to the AGM. In 2022, Vernon Lediett, the grandson of one of our founders Norm Lediett, donated

\$3000 to the VTA. Vernon's preference was for half of the donation to be used for the betterment of the Saulteaux and Penewobikong Sections, and for the second half to be used as the Coordinating Council (CC) saw fit. At CC meetings there was a lot of talk about how best to use the donation, and we decided to use the funds to start an annual VTA Bursary program, with \$500 bursaries being offered at both Sault College and Confederation College in Thunder Bay. The consensus of the CC was that there could be no better way for our Association to give back to our communities, after 50 years of support from them, than by supporting the youngest amongst us.

At that point of the meeting, Casque Isles representatives presented the VTA Treasurer Kees van Frankenhuyzen with a \$1000 cheque to assist in funding the

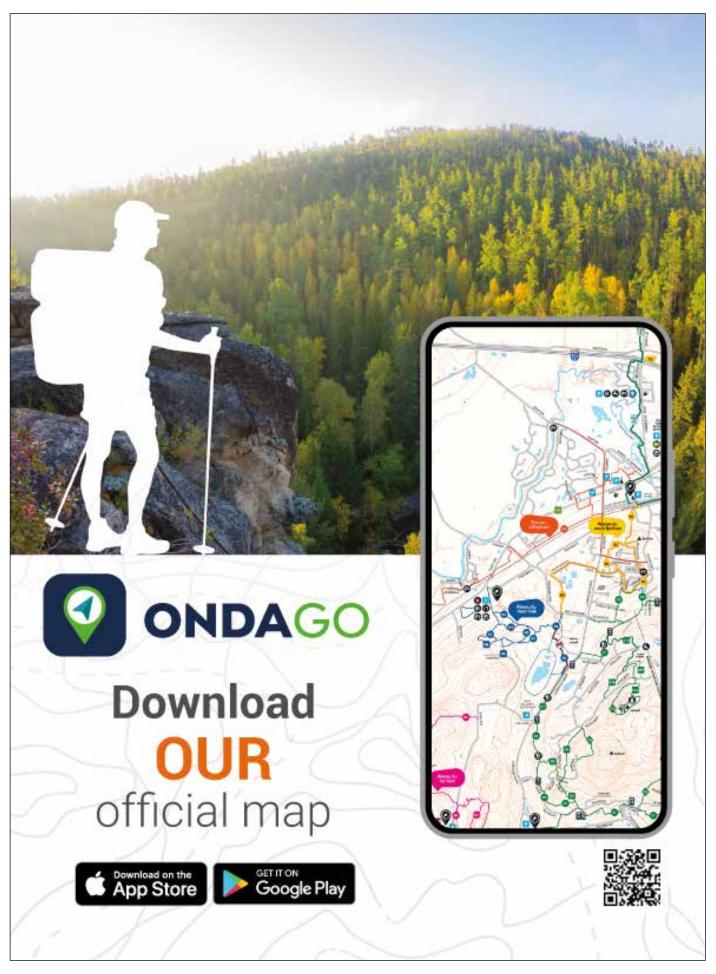
bursary program. Our next steps are to decide on a criteria and institute the bursaries with the Colleges, but we are pleased to tie together funding from the Lediett family to further post secondary education.

The Coordinating Council wishes to thank Vernon for his donation to the VTA, and we hope that he is proud of his part in the bursary program.

Susan Graham was nominated by Gail Jones for the Steve Taylor Volunteer of the Year. The Coordinating Council present at the meeting accepted the nomination, and the 2024 Steve Taylor Award will be presented at a later date. Susan, a past President of the VTA, has just recently stepped aside from the Saulteaux executive. In her 37 years as a member of the VTA, Susan has held one position or another for 35 of those years. She and her husband Cliff also maintained a stretch of the Saulteaux Section for many years. They continue their VTA involvement as 'keepers' of the Saulteaux Club's cache of trail maintenance supplies. Congratulations Susan, this award is well deserved!

Before adjournment of the AGM, the Membership Report was presented. This information is presented to the Association to show how we are doing, year to year. The VTA remains a strong organization, and we will continue to promote the relevance of the Association as needed.

Membership – By the Numbers					
CLUB NAME	MARCH 2022	OCTOBER 2022	JANUARY 2023	MARCH 2023	CURRENT
At Large	28	39	39	42	42
Casque Isles	24	23	20	20	38
G7 Trail Marathon	4	5	5	5	5
Michipicoten	4	3	3	3	5
Nor'wester	32	14	13	16	17
Penewobikong	12	20	18	17	24
Saulteaux	199	233	240	229	299
Total	301	337	338	332	430



# **Hiking as an Ounce** of Prevention

By Steve Taylor

At the Third Ontario Hiking Conference, Dr. Trevor Smith gave an interesting talk entitled 'The Psychological Benefits from Hiking.' At the end of his talk, it was apparent to those who attended that hiking can play an important role in building a healthier (physically and mentally) society. Trevor explained that the cost of quality medical service is very high, and if the pattern of increasing cost does not change, the quality of "affordable" care will suffer. Doctors and specialists should be emphasizing preventative body maintenance in order to reduce the amount of medical attention required. This preventative maintenance can lead to better health and fewer medical treatments through middle age, as well as reducing the period of decreased mobility at the end of one's life.

Hiking would appear to be a good activity for many people who wish to take this advice. Although there is a risk of injury, particularly for those who try to do too much too soon, the potential benefits outweigh the risks. As well as the obvious physical benefits of hiking, it seems that this form of low intensity aerobic activity improves psychology.

Physically active people are happier, cope with stress better, and have fewer problems with high blood pressure. In addition, regular exercise is a treatment for diabetes. Dr. Smith presented some supporting data but cautioned that more research is needed to better substantiate these points.

I think it is obvious to anyone who has hiked through a forest full of spring wildflowers or climbed a cliff overlooking Lake Superior that hiking soothes the mind, bringing a peaceful sense of well-being and harmony. When those who don't know this yet figure it out, then maybe the entire Voyageur Trail will be completed and maintained by many people in a healthier society.

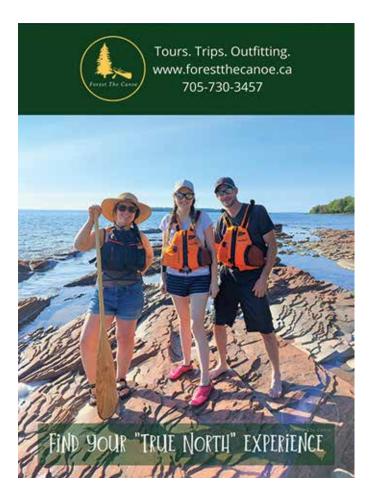
Reprinted from the Autumn 1989 Voyageur Trail News. This article is as relevant today as when it was written.



Waterfalls along Crimson Ridge side trail Saulteaux section.



View at Mazukama Falls, Nor'wester (Nipigon) Section.



# One Man's Legacy Mr. Vallée's Park

This article appeared in a special feature of *The Sault Star* published on Sept. 16, 1994. It is reprinted with permission.

Mr. Vallée's trail is now part of the Michipicoten Section of the Voyageur Trail. Photos are from an outing at the October 1993 Annual General Meeting of the VTA held in Wawa.

### By Joan Brooks

"Mr. Vallée's" Park – A Vision of One Man, developed by one man, for all to enjoy. However, it was for the children of Wawa that he created this safe haven for them to play, to fish and to explore.

Originally from Sherbrooke, Quebec, Arsene Jose Vallée, affectionately known as "Mr. Vallée", began his creation in 1984. The Park extends from Wawa Creek up a height of land and through to Anderson Lake and is a favorite walking place for residents and visitors alike.

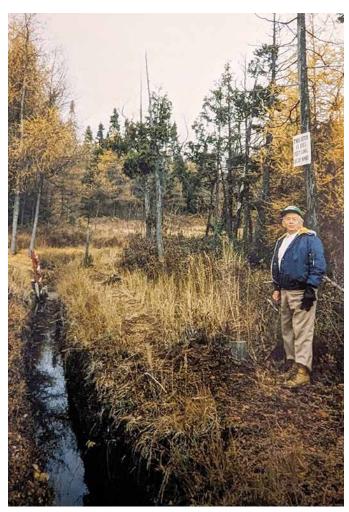
He came to Wawa in 1949 seeking employment and remained here following his retirement. He was a veteran of World War II and a past member of Wawa's Branch 429 of the Royal Canadian Legion.

"Mr. Vallée" died July 11, 1994, peacefully in his room on Broadway Avenue, and is buried in Woodland Cemetery in Wawa. He was 77 years old.

His Park is a hilly, winding, rugged, wholesome adventure. First you'll see a clean, clear, bubbling Wawa Creek, which was his starting point. He removed old culverts, assorted garbage and debris which had accumulated over the years. He then brushed along the banks of the Creek.

Next, was the foot bridge he built over the Creek. He scavenged timbers from the Township and contributed, at his own expense, the concrete, lumber and nails. Next came a "path" up the hill – a wooden stairway consisting of six steps and two landings. This was later followed by 54 concrete steps and 11 landings. He also cleared the underbrush and old mountain ash trees leaving the good trees alone. According to Jean Roberts, he wanted "to give people a place where they could sit and rest and look down at the town." He continued to create a walkway through to Anderson Lake, meeting each obstacle as a challenge to be conquered. His concern for children playing in a swampy area led him to drain the swamp. How? Alone, he dug a 1000-foot trench, three feet wide by three-to-five feet deep, which ended at Anderson Lake. He also brushed all the trees along the way, creating room for plants, and wildlife to grow and prosper.

(continued on page 11)



Mr. Vallée beside his 1000-foot hand-dug ditch.



Concrete steps, hand-poured by Mr. Vallée.

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There are two special picnic areas. The first one to be built was at Anderson Lake and boasts a 14-foot picnic table built from timbers, which overlooks the quiet little lake. There are seven wooden steps down to the table, and a further 11 steps to the lake.

The second was completed in the past year and overlooks what used to be the swamp, and is now a beautiful grassy field. It has a 12 foot table, built on the top of a large rock. Thirteen wooden steps lead you down to the walkways along the trench.

All his work was done using basic hand tools such as an axe, a pick and a hand saw. He mixed all the concrete by hand. He could also be seen climbing a stepladder to clean trees of dead brush, and he had his trusty wheelbarrow. He always carried a plastic bag with him to clean up any garbage that might be left in the Park.

Linda Nowicki hikes daily through the Park with her dog. She spoke with affection of the many steps and walkways within the Park and commented that "if a stairway could be built to heaven, we could hire Mr. Vallée."

Mr. Vallée did not accomplish his mission without a great deal of struggle, and often heartache. A "Labour of Love," he worked every day, often when he wasn't feeling well. He drove the process. He drove himself, and especially the Municipal staff, who always assisted him any way they could. Matt Ward, Superintendent of Municipal Operations, recalled the day Mr. Vallée "quit." He was building the concrete steps to the top of the first hill. Near the top a large rock was in his way, and he couldn't go any further.

He wanted to buy a case of blasting powder to blast the rock out of the way, but for various reasons the blasting wasn't

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possible. Mr. Vallée was informed by the Township that it couldn't be done. The next morning Ward went to work and in his office was Mr. Vallée's chainsaw, his axe, a gas can and oil, and a very upset Mr. Vallée. He stated "I quit! ... if I can't blast that hill, I quit!!" Ward felt strongly that this just couldn't be.

Following several phone calls and discussions about this dilemma, one Saturday morning, Ward, along with Jim David, who did the blasting, the Township Police, who kept the people back, and several volunteers, made it happen. There was no stopping Mr. Vallée from then on.

Nothing was impossible for Mr. Vallée. His determination was Legend. He did not like special attention, but loved to talk about his Park. "He was the Park," said Ward. "I wonder how far it's going to go now ... to go up and see him was a big part of it ... He always had time to stop and talk."

His presence in the Park is noticeably missing. He is missed by the many who visited with him over the years and who enjoyed watching his progress and hearing about his beloved park, often "with a delightful twinkle in his eye".

And where is his best friend – his landlord's dog, "Lady" – who followed Mr. Vallée everywhere? "She's lonely, she misses him, she wanders around looking for him," said Paul Begin, in whose home Mr. Vallée lived for 25 years. "We all miss him. He was like a grandfather to us, to my boys and my wife," said Begin. "I miss him a lot!!"

Wawa is so rich for having known Mr. Vallée. He left a legacy for us all to enjoy – Mr. Vallée's Park. He used sheer determination and hard work to methodically carve his Vision out of a wilderness, a Vision that began with his desire to create a safer place for children to play – and ended as a lasting remembrance to a very special man.

















Reprinted with permission

# **Hiking for Beginners:** 7 Tips to Get You Started

Living in Canada, we are extremely fortunate to count 347 million hectares of forest, 243,042 kilometres of ocean shoreline, 43 national parks, over 32,000 lakes, and the longest multi-use recreational trail in the world: the Trans Canada Trail. To put it simply, Canada is a world-class playground with infinite possibilities.

Getting ready for your first hike is an exciting prospect, but it does require a certain level of preparation. Here are our hiking tips to ensure that your first hike on the Trail is as mind-blowing as it should be!

### THE RIGHT GEAR

Before embarking on any hiking expedition, it's crucial to equip yourself with the right gear. Invest in a sturdy pair of hiking boots, comfortable clothing and a backpack, and don't forget essentials like a map, compass and first aid kit. Remember, good preparation leads to a great hike!

### **KNOW THE TRAIL**

Research and familiarize yourself with the trail you plan to hike. Understand the difficulty level, distance and terrain. Each trail has its unique challenges, so be prepared mentally and physically. Start with easier trails and gradually progress to more challenging ones as your skills improve. On the day of your hike, always make sure to check the weather forecast before and during your adventure.

### **SAFETY FIRST**

Safety should always be a priority. Inform someone about your hiking plans, including your route and expected return time. Carry a fully charged cell phone and a whistle for emergencies. Learn basic first aid skills and how to handle unexpected situations like encounters with wildlife or sudden weather changes.

### PACE YOURSELF

Hiking is not a race; it's an opportunity to connect with nature. Start at a comfortable pace and listen to your body. Take breaks to rest, hydrate and enjoy the surroundings. Pace yourself, and soon you'll find your rhythm and be able to tackle longer distances.

### **LEAVE NO TRACE**

As responsible hikers, it's essential to minimize our impact on the environment. Follow the principles of "Leave No Trace" by disposing of waste properly, staying on marked trails and respecting wildlife. Leave the trail as pristine as you found it, ensuring future generations can enjoy its beauty, too.

### EMBRACE THE UNEXPECTED

Hiking trails bring countless surprises and unexpected encounters. Be open to these magical moments. Pause to admire a hidden waterfall, observe wildlife or marvel at breathtaking vistas. The trail is not just a physical journey; it's an opportunity for personal growth and self-discovery.

### LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE

Every hike is a learning experience. Reflect on your journey, the challenges you faced and the lessons you've learned. Use these insights to enhance your future hikes and share your wisdom with fellow hikers. Remember, the trail is ever evolving, and each step is a chance to grow.

Whether you're a beginner or a seasoned hiker, the Trans Canada Trail awaits, ready to unveil its wonders. Lace up your boots, take these tips to heart and let your journey begin!







- 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 2024 Newsletter is April 7, 2024.

Mail to: Steve Dominy, c/o Voyageur Trail Association P.O. Box 22009 RPO Cambrian Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario P6B 0E93

Or email to: info@voyageurtrail.ca

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

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

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





# VTA Photo Gallery

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

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



Crimson Ridge Loop, Saulteaux section.



Trail between Carpin Beach Road and Creek Road, Saulteaux section.



On the Red Chairs Trail, Casque Isles Section.



Hiawatha Highlands area trail, Saulteaux section.



Coastal Trail, Group of Seven section.



Mazukama Falls, Nor'wester section.

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