

# **STATE OF THE OAK RIDGES MORaine TRAIL – 2005**

by  
Harold Sellers  
Executive Director  
Oak Ridges Trail Association  
June 21, 2005

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

Starting in 1992, the Oak Ridges Trail Association has now assembled a 200 km-long hiking trail, built and maintained by volunteers, and supported by the citizens of Ontario, the communities of the Oak Ridges Moraine, governments at all levels, public agencies and non-governmental organizations.

Since the passing of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act and Plan, and the establishment of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, the Oak Ridges Trail Association has produced a Trail Strategy, which has identified an Optimum Trail Corridor and laid out several ambitious goals for the association.

Before we come back to some of those goals, I would like to review what we have accomplished thus far.

Moving from east to west along the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, we have achieved:

- 33 km of trail in Northumberland County
- Scenic section of trail overlooking Rice Lake from a Moraine highpoint
- The trail takes users to the Rice Lake waterfront park in Bewdley
- Trail through the full east-west length of the Ganaraska Forest, one of the largest areas of forest cover in southern Ontario
- Connection with the 500 km long Ganaraska Hiking Trail in the Ganaraska Forest, where we share 12 km of common trail route
- Bluebird Side Trail near the junction of Hwys 35 and 115; bluebird nesting boxes installed by ORTA members
- 88 km of main trail spans Durham Region
- 6 km of trail within Long Sault Conservation Area is the result of a partnership with the Central Lake Ontario Conservation Area
- Long Sault is popular for hiking and winter cross country skiing and snowshoeing
- The trail takes users through the historic village of Burketon Station, once a key railway stop. This is just one of many historically significant points of interest on the trail.
- On the crest of the Moraine, south of Port Perry, hikers can look north and see Lake Scugog or south and see Lake Ontario, as well as the skyline of Toronto

- Ocala Orchards Farm Winery is a popular stop on the trail as we pass by the farm driveway. This is a good example of the economic benefit of our trail to communities.
- In Scugog Township the trail crosses the route used as a trail by the Mississauga Nation and fur traders in the 1700s
- In Uxbridge Township over 38 km of trail, including 17 km of side trails, interweave through the many forest tracts owned by Durham Region as well as the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority
- In the Walker Tract we share several kilometers of trail with the Trans Canada Trail as it runs from Uxbridge to Ajax
- Walking from the eastern boundary of York Region, we walk beside Musselman Lake, one of the largest kettle lakes on the moraine
- 75 km of main trail and 27 km of side trails have been built in York Region
- Seven separate tracts of the York Regional Forest system are connected by the Oak Ridges Trail
- Villages of Musselman Lake, Ballantrae, and Vandorf are on the Oak Ridges Trail
- Using town parks and some of its most historic streets, the trail passes through Aurora, crossing Yonge Street in the centre of the commercial district
- In Aurora, a connection is made to the Nokiidaa Trail which follows the Holland River through Aurora, Newmarket and Holland Landing
- Lake Simcoe Conservation Authority has provided parking areas and side trail routes to connect to the main trail
- In King Township the trail passes through two institutional properties which have provided some of the most popular sections of the trail: Seneca College's King Campus on the former Eaton Country Estate and Marylake Augustinian Monastery on the former country property of Sir Henry Pellatt
- Seneca College King Campus provided the first section of trail to be designated as accessible to people with disabilities, the Woodland Passage Trail, opened last October
- Both Seneca College and Marylake Monastery provided a route for a side trail that links the Oak Ridges Trail to King City's trail system
- The historic portage route between Lake Ontario and Lake Simcoe, and on to Georgian Bay – known as the Toronto Carrying Place Trail – is crossed in King Township
- In the western part of King Township several private landowners have provided access for the trail, showcasing the agricultural community on the Moraine
- Entering Peel Region at the Town of Caledon the Oak Ridges Trail meets the Caledon Trailway, a rail trail also used by the Trans Canada Trail –our second meeting with the TCT
- The Caledon Trailway brings us to our current trailhead at Hwy 50

In addition to these trail accomplishments, I would also like to tell you that the Oak Ridges Trail Association has a very active guided hike program, where trained hike leaders skillfully provide over 250 group walks each year.

To assist the public and association members, a guidebook to the trail has been published, with several thousand copies, in three editions, being sold.

With the financial support and assistance of the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, the Oak Ridges Trail Association not only wrote a strategy for the trail, but also established a staffed office and recently launched a trail securement plan. A partnership with the Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust provides an opportunity for landowners, who support the trail and also want to see the moraine preserved and enjoyed in its natural state, a means to protect their land for the benefit of Ontarians today and tomorrow.

I also wish to acknowledge the support of the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which has generously supported our trail advocacy work.

## **TODAY**

This brings us to today's very special announcement, made earlier at our press conference.

With the enthusiastic cooperation and support of the Town of Caledon, which owns and maintain the Caledon Trailway, the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail now connects to the Bruce Trail via a short stretch of the Caledon Trailway.

The Bruce Trail, running 800 km along the Niagara Escarpment between Queenston and Tobermory, has a connection to the village of Palgrave, where it joins the Caledon Trailway. And as mentioned earlier, the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail also joins and follows the Caledon Trailway.

The linking of the Oak Ridges and Bruce trails – with the many other trails that connect to them – has resulted in a network of over 2,500 km of hiking and walking trails in southern Ontario. Much of this network exists within the recently designated Greenbelt.

This achievement stands as one of the most important trail building accomplishments in the history of Canada, and will undoubtedly lead to worldwide recognition of our trails. It is a legacy of the vision, commitment and dedication of numerous volunteers and supporters.

## THE FUTURE

Where do we go from here?

Here are some examples of what we are now working towards. Additional trail will be built in Peel Region and into Dufferin and Simcoe Counties, eventually reaching the Niagara Escarpment.

In the east the trail will extend to the Trent River.

40% of the trail today uses country roads and town streets. We will be working hard to reduce this, replacing road routes with natural area trail achieved through agreements to use public lands as well as some privately owned properties.

The identified Optimum Trail Corridor gives us areas to focus on where the trail can connect natural areas protected under the Moraine and Greenbelt legislation.

Watch for new routes thanks to our friends at the various Conservation Authorities on the moraine.

The Oak Ridges Trail will follow a second route across Yonge Street, this one in Richmond Hill on park lands designated by the province through an agreement reached with land developers. This new route will also open opportunities for connections to other municipalities and communities, such as the City of Vaughan and the Town of Richmond Hill.

Linkages with the communities of Schomberg, Goodwood, Millbrook, and Castleton, are in the planning stages.

The Federal Greenspace Lands, part of the Federal Government's Pickering holdings, will see the development of a trail system, connected to the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail.

The Town of Uxbridge has the objective of being known as Canada's Trail Capital. Their trail network will have several connections to the Oak Ridges Trail.

North-south linkages between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario, and its shoreline communities, is a major objective. Progress has already been made to connect to the Waterfront Trail, the Seaton Trail and Rouge Park.

An eastern gateway to the Oak Ridges Moraine will see the trail reach communities such as Warkworth and Campbellford. A third connection to the Trans Canada Trail will be achieved to the east.

Additional accessible sections of the Oak Ridges Trail will be opened in the Municipality of Clarington, the Town of Aurora, Whitchurch-Stouffville Township

and King Township, as well other locations, giving those with disabilities the opportunity to visit and experience all of the natural features of the moraine.

Public access to the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail will be improved through the establishment of more parking areas and roadside signage, helping visitors to locate the trail.

A trail is an evolving man-made structure. We create it for our enjoyment as individuals, families or groups. It's a place to encounter nature, to find solitude, to share experiences with friends, to benefit our physical and mental health, to find spiritual strength, and to breath fresh air.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Trail is for people and on behalf of the Oak Ridges Trail Association and the Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, I extend an invitation to all to visit and enjoy this public trail.

Thankyou.