



TRAIL TALK

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A Message from Your New Race Director – Jacquelin Heichert

Hello ORTA Members,

I'm thrilled to introduce myself as the new Race Director for the Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay! This is an incredible opportunity, and I'm excited to help lead one of Ontario's most epic, unique and inspiring endurance events.

The 2026 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay is officially set for Saturday, June 13, 2026, and registration is now open! Spanning approximately 160km from Rice Lake (Peterborough area) to Aurora (with a shorter half-relay on the eastern portion of the course), the relay combines canoeing, mountain biking, road cycling, and trail running across the stunning Oak Ridges Moraine trail system. This relay is more than a race—it's a celebration of teamwork, adventure, and the natural beauty of the Moraine. Every participant helps support trail conservation and the mission of ORTA.



Event Highlights:

- Full Relay: ~160 km, 14 stages, teams up to 15
- Half Relay: ~90 km, 7 stages, teams up to 7
- Two Divisions: Elite division for competitive athletes and Recreational division for adventure enthusiasts
- Register Now: <https://www.oakridgestrail.org/adventure-relay/>

I'd love your help in making this year's relay the biggest and best yet.

Hike News and Information—Derek Cowbourn

Hikes

ORTA offered 270 hikes in 2025. My thanks to our hike leaders for making this happen and to all of you who are enjoying the range of locations, speeds, and distances that are available. I'm looking forward to another year of great hikes in 2026.

New Hike Leaders

My congratulations to ORTA members Angela Barbetta and Liz Elliot who recently completed the Certified Hike Leader course run by Hike Ontario. Please show your welcome by registering for their hikes.

We're always seeking additional active hike leaders, especially for moderate paced hikes, so please let me know at hikes@oakridgestrail.org if you are interested in taking a hike leader training course in 2026.

End-to-End

Completing the End-to-End of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail is a major accomplishment, whether it takes a year or more to complete it or it's done within a few weeks. So many congratulations to the following E2Eers who received their badge in 2025: non-members Bonnie and Rob Langille, and members David Atkins, Don Hatch and Galina Szlapetis.

A Safety Reminder

Please check your email and messages before setting out to the meeting location for a hike. Why? It's not unusual for a hike to be cancelled when freezing rain is forecast. Blowing snow could also lead to a cancellation. But such cancellations are not just a winter possibility: severe thunderstorms, flooding, extreme winds, etc., can all lead to short-notice cancellations. Checking your email and messages could mean you avoid a wasted or even hazardous journey.

Exclusive Member Benefit: Save at SAIL!

We're excited to share a new perk for ORTA members! Thanks to our partnership with SAIL, one of Canada's leading outdoor retailers, ORTA members now receive exclusive discounts on a wide



range of outdoor gear and apparel. Whether you're gearing up for a hike on the Oak Ridges Moraine or planning your next adventure, this is a great opportunity to save. [Click here](#) to learn more and access your discount.

ORTA Holiday Potluck Event



Keeping Traditions Alive!

On Sunday, December 7th, ORTA held its annual Holiday Potluck preceded by two morning hikes. Brian and Wilma led their traditional Anniversary hike in North Walker Woods and Amir led a 2nd adventurous group through the Brock Tract. Snow came early to Uxbridge this year making the trekking a challenge.

About 60 members joined us following the hikes for the festive potluck making for a fun kick-off to the winter hiking season. Everyone enjoyed the many treats, photo slideshow, and holiday tunes. Thanks go out to Anna for putting the entertainment together and huge congratulations to member Zeljka for winning the raffle basket!

ORTA New Year's Eve Hike – What a way to finish off 2025!

Hike lead by Bob Comfort in the Skyloft Tract and Durham Forest for 12km.



Photos Provided by Anna Sun

Help Keep Our Trails Safe and Enjoyable

The Oak Ridges Trail relies on volunteers and hikers to keep it in great shape. If you come across any maintenance issues—such as fallen trees, damaged signage, or other hazards—please report them promptly to trails@oakridgestrail.org.

Your feedback helps us respond quickly and maintain a safe, enjoyable experience for everyone.

Have questions about what to bring or hike etiquette? Visit our FAQ page:

oakridgestrail.org/hikes/faq

ORTA Hikers are Out on the Trails All Four Seasons...



A little bit of snow never stopped a determined group of hikers!



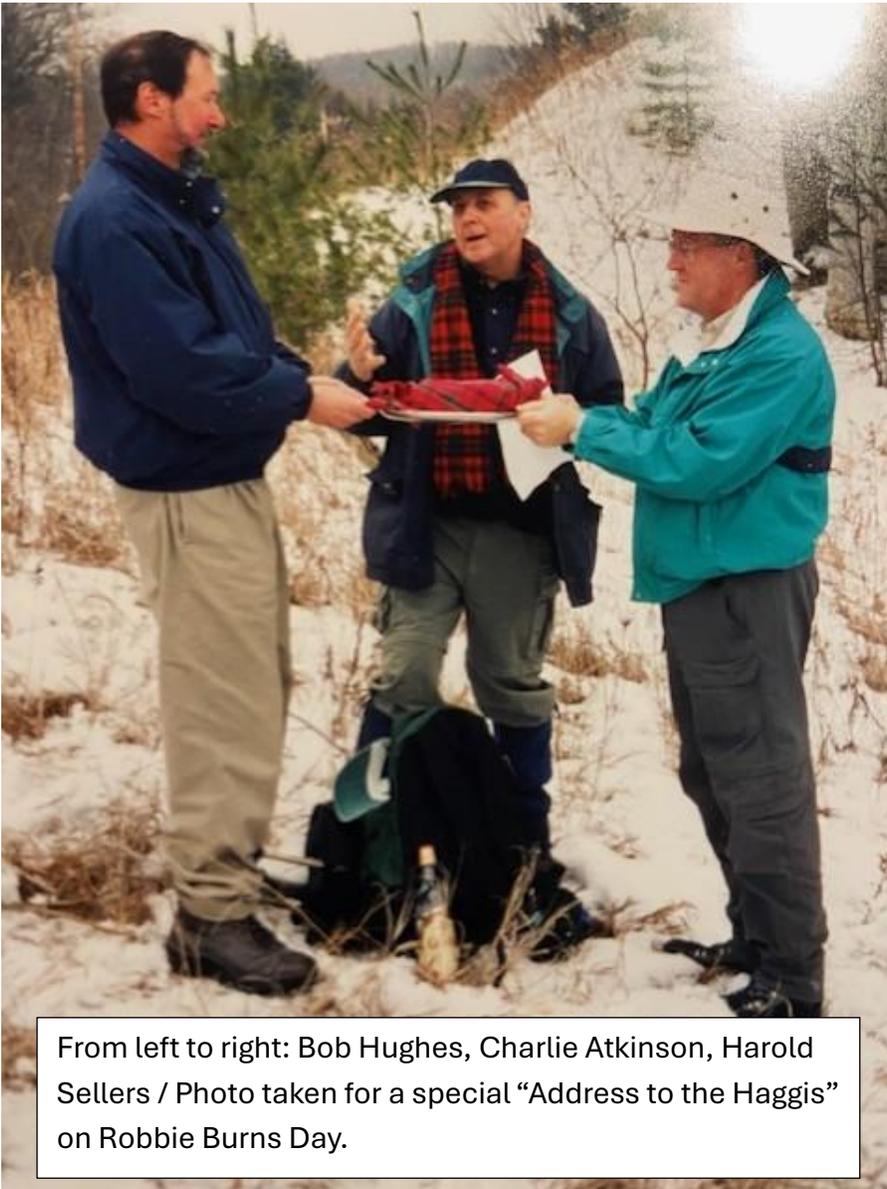


Save the Date! 2026 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay- June 13!



The Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay will return on June 13th, 2026- mark your calendars now!

Tribute to Bob Hughes by Brian Millage



From left to right: Bob Hughes, Charlie Atkinson, Harold Sellers / Photo taken for a special "Address to the Haggis" on Robbie Burns Day.

Bob Hughes-In Memorium:

Many ORTA hikers have special memories of hikes on the ORTA trails with Bob and Diane Hughes. They were both early members of ORTA, in the 1990's, hike leaders and supporters in so many ways. Bob even set up the early ORTA website and monitored it for many years. I remember his consistent efforts to keep Chapter Chairs informed of new memberships so we could welcome the new hikers and answer their questions about the wide variety of hikes and special events offered.

Bob passed away this past November. Bob and Diane spent their summers at the family cottage welcoming family and friends, so none of us were aware of his sudden health challenges this past

year until I made a social call, was greeted by his son, and learned that Bob was going into palliative care. He passed a few days later. We hold many fond memories of days on trail, lunches afterwards, canoe and kayak outings, participation in Robbie Burns hikes and ORTA Christmas parties.

I will never forget one of those wonderful post hike lunches. I had left the table briefly and a photo of the group was taken in my absence. Where is the hike leader in the photo? With his techie wizardry, Bob had inserted my photo on a platter at the centre of the group. At least he didn't put an apple in my mouth.

Our deepest condolences to Diane and her family. We will all retain special memories.

Welcome Tomasz Solkowski – ORTA’s New Trail Director

We are delighted to welcome Tomasz (Tom) Solkowski as the new Trail Director for the Oak Ridges Trail Association (ORTA). Tom joins us in this volunteer leadership role with a deep passion for the outdoors, trails, and environmental stewardship.

As Trail Director, Tom will work closely with our dedicated volunteers to oversee trail maintenance and improvements. When possible, he will also contribute to initiatives aligned with the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy. His commitment to enhancing the trail experience will be a tremendous asset to ORTA as we continue to grow and evolve.



Tom is currently hiking the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail end-to-end and has completed several sections of the Bruce Trail. His hiking adventures also include time in Algonquin Park and across Europe. Professionally, Tom is an experienced IT professional, bringing both technical and organizational skills to his new role.

We’re excited about the energy and vision Tom brings to ORTA. Please join us in giving him a warm welcome to the team!

Tom can be reached at trails@oakridgestrail.org or tomasz@oakridgestrail.org

New Hike Leader Announcement:

Elizabeth (Liz) Elliot-Jakymyc

I’m a certified Hike Leader with ORTA and a lifelong lover of the outdoors. I began hiking with ORTA just over a year ago. I enjoy easy to moderate hikes—active enough for a good workout, yet relaxed enough to take in the scenery, snap photos, and connect with fellow hikers. Forest trails and water views



are my favorites, and my motto is: *“Take nothing, leave nothing.”*

I’m an avid runner with multiple half-marathons, trail races, and triathlons, and I love adventure—from horseback riding in the Rockies to whitewater rafting, scuba diving, and skydiving. Professionally, I’ve worked at CIBC and Xerox Canada, served as a Health & Safety Officer, and completed St. John Ambulance First Aid training.

Looking forward to seeing you on the trails!

ORTA Announces New Race Director for 2026 Adventure Relay!

The **Oak Ridges Trail Association** is thrilled to announce that **Jacquelin Heichert** has stepped up to serve as **Race Director** for the **2026 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay!** Jacquelin brings energy, leadership, and a passion for community engagement to this pivotal role. With her guidance—and the support of our amazing volunteers—we’re confident the 2026 Relay will be an unforgettable event.

Many of us still remember the excitement at the checkpoints, the camaraderie among volunteers, and the thrill of cheering on racers. Let’s rally together and make this year’s relay the best yet!

Learn more about the Adventure Relay:

- Website: oakridgestrail.org/adventure-relay
- Email: relay@oakridgestrail.org



Join us in congratulating Jacquelin and supporting her in this exciting endeavor!

Save-the-date!

Notice of the Annual General Meeting – Thursday, April 30, 2026 at 7 p.m.

All members of the Oak Ridges Trail Association are invited to attend the Annual General Meeting of the Association to be held at Ballantrae Community Centre, 5592 Aurora Road, Stouffville on April 30. We look forward to seeing many supporters, hikers and friends on this occasion. If you will be putting forward a motion for consideration of the membership, please

share with the Board before April 15, 2026, for inclusion to the agenda. Send to secretary@oakridgestrail.org .

ORTA Election of Directors – 2026-2027

We will once again put forth a slate of nominees to be elected to serve as Directors for a period of one year. We are seeking new ideas and perspectives and your input is welcomed. We meet about six times annually and hope that you will join us. To be eligible for election as a [Director](#) at the Annual General Meeting of Members, a person must:

- a. Be a member in good standing
- b. Have confirmed in writing their willingness to serve as a director

Award Nominations for 2025 - 2026

Each year the Oak Ridges Trail Association seeks to honour and say thanks to those members who have made significant contributions to our organization and the development of the ORMT.

The award categories are Commendation Awards, Trail Builder Awards and Lifetime Achievement Award.

More information on submissions and how to nominate will be posted to the website in the coming weeks. In the interim, nominations can be sent to gayemas@rogers.com.

Our [previous award recipients](#) are posted on our website.

Happy New Year from ORTA!

In this issue, we're excited to introduce [Jacquelin](#), our new Relay Director for the Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay, and [Tomasz](#), our Trail Director. These roles are vital to ORTA's success, and I encourage all members to rally around Jacquelin and Tomasz in the coming months.

They may reach out with requests, but please also feel free to contact them if you have experience or ideas that could help. Like any organization, it's easy to fall into "the way we've always done it." Let's stay open and supportive of new approaches. Sometimes trying something new may not work the first time—but encouragement goes a long way.

We all share a passion for the Moraine and the work of ORTA. With your support, this will be an exciting and productive year ahead. Thank you for your membership and commitment to our trails.

Sincerely,

Karen Graham
President, Oak Ridges Trail Association