



TRAIL TALK

Oak Ridges Trail Association Quarterly
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The Oak Ridges Trail Association

ORTA's Annual Charitable Fundraising Event



Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay June 13, 2026

An epic one-day Adventure Relay race across one of Ontario's most ecologically and culturally significant landscapes.

The full relay combines canoeing, cycling, and running across 160km of the stunning Oak Ridges Moraine from Rice Lake to Aurora and through 15 checkpoints all supported by over 100 volunteers. Join us!



🏁 Register now  oakridgestrail.org/adventure-relay

Get Involved with The Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay – June 13th

The 2026 Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay is on June 13, 2026! The relay provides the funding and community mobilization needed to sustain the Oak Ridges Moraine trail system for the long term. It unites racers, volunteers, supporters, families, and local organizations across multiple municipalities.

I'm Jacquelin Heichert, this year's Race Director, many of you have received emails from me if you're volunteering or racing for the relay and I wanted to say thank you for the enthusiasm you've already brought to the 2026 Adventure Relay. With over 120 volunteers spread across 15 checkpoints supporting 16 or more racing teams with up to 15 racers per team, there are a lot of moving parts including logistics, training, supplies, timing systems, signage, safety plans, and more. Your enthusiasm makes a big difference and has already set us up for a great day. However, there is still much to do, please see below on our early successes and what's needed as we move into the summer.



Volunteers: We already have 112 volunteers signed up, which is absolutely amazing! But we're still looking for volunteers, particularly for the eastern section of the race including Rice Lake, Bewdley and Clarington. If you haven't already signed up, or if you know anyone who would be interested, complete our Volunteer Interest Form.

Team Meeting: We will be holding our Adventure Relay Team Meeting on May 20 from 6-8pm at the Goodwood Community Centre. It will be a chance for checkpoint teams to meet, review all the important information about the roles and pick up materials.

Trail Maintenance: Tomasz Solkowski, ORTA's Trail Director will be organizing our Trail Maintenance Team to help ensure the route is safe, navigable, and enjoyable for racers in the weeks leading up to race day.

Race Teams: We are thrilled that we already have 16 Race Teams registered with 83 racers so far who will be taking on the Adventure Relay race! This isn't a solo marathon, it's a team relay, where the distance is broken into manageable stages and shared across teammates. Racers are able to take on one stage or rotate with their teammates through checkpoints, supporting each other, swapping roles, and moving across the Moraine together. This is the kind of race where teammates become the support crew, effort is shared and the finish feels better because it was earned together. To participate, complete our Racer Registration Form!

Supporters of the Relay: We are so proud that so many organizations are supporting the Adventure Relay. The Greenbelt Foundation is generously supporting the relay through the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail Strategy Implementation Project. Checkpoint #8 is presented by The Second Wedge Brewing Co. Checkpoint #2 is presented by Bentscape. Checkpoint #9-Mid-Race Hub is supported in-kind by Trail Hub. As well, a number of community organizations are contributing to prize packages, see our Sponsor webpage for details. There are lots of different sponsorship opportunities available, if you are a business owner, or know anyone who would be a great fit, contact jacquelin@oakridgestrail.org. Sponsors help make the Adventure Relay possible!

Hike News and Information—Derek Cowbourne

Hike Leaders: New and Needed

My congratulations to ORTA members Barb Anderson and Teri Tworzyanski 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 and, at the moment, there is a particular need for those interested in slow-mod and moderate paced hikes. Please let me know at hikes@oakridgestrail.org if you are interested in taking a hike leader training course in 2026.

Our leaders offered 69 hikes in the first quarter of 2026.

Mud, mud, glorious mud, there's nothing quite like it...! (With thanks to Flanders & Swann and others)

Spring is the time for mud, but we can still hike safely and responsibly: try to prioritize trail preservation, definitely wear appropriate gear, and consider adjusting your hiking style

Trail Etiquette and Preservation

- **Hike *through* the mud, not around it.** Walking around muddy sections damages trailside vegetation, causes erosion, and widens the trail. Get dirty to protect the environment!
- **Stay in the centre of the trail.** This is usually the most durable section of the path. Use existing rock or log stepping stones where available.

- **Respect trail closures.** If a trail is closed due to muddy or unsafe conditions, choose an alternate route. Ignoring closures can cause long-lasting damage requiring significant maintenance to fix.
- **Check trail conditions beforehand.** Look up recent reports on park websites or in local hiking social media groups to get an idea of what to expect.

Gear Recommendations

- **Wear appropriate footwear.** Use waterproof hiking boots with deep, aggressive lugs for better traction in slick conditions.
- **Use gaiters.** These protective coverings go over your boots and lower legs to prevent mud and water from getting inside your shoes.
- **Pack extra socks and a change of clothes.** Keep these items in a dry bag inside your pack. Leave a spare pair of shoes and a towel in your car for after the hike.
- **Use trekking poles.** Poles provide extra balance and stability. You can also use them to probe the depth of a muddy section before committing your weight.
- **Waterproof your backpack.** Use an internal liner or a rain cover to keep your essential gear dry.

Hiking Techniques

- **Slow down and take smaller steps.** Mud is slippery, so reduce your pace and shorten your stride to maintain control and prevent falls.
- **Commit to your steps.** Hesitating or shifting your weight mid-puddle can cause you to sink deeper or lose balance.
- **Hike in the morning.** The ground may still be frozen, making it firmer and easier to traverse.
- **Be prepared to turn around.** If conditions become unsafe or the trail is excessively damaged, it is okay to turn back and choose a different day or location.
- **Clean your gear after the hike.** Rinse the mud off your boots and gear with a hose as soon as possible to prevent the mud from degrading the materials over time.

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.

Wilma and Brian- 25 Years and Stepping Back (from the ORTA Board)

I still remember the last days of my (paid) working life- December 2001. What next? Stay active- I love the outdoors (thanks Dad) - I think I'll try ORTA. Hikers are social, get lots of exercise and I can help maintain the trails across the Moraine. Little did I realize that I would meet my future wife on one of those early Wednesday hikes. May 2002- Wilma and I started chatting during a hike and have never stopped. Maybe it was the exchange of chocolate coated strawberries and cookies on the next hike that sealed the deal.

December 3, 2003 was a turning point in our lives as 72 ORTA hikers joined us on the trail south of Uxbridge to tie the knot- the minister hiked in with additional members of our families and John Musselman of CTV even recorded the event. The champagne and butter tarts were shared, the wild bird seed was thrown, the walk through an arch of hiking poles performed- and the tradition continues, annually. (we still hold hands on hikes).

After more than 25years - what a retirement project it has been for both of us- we feel it is time to let another generation plan the future direction for ORTA. Wilma started as publicity director designing ORTA brochures and spreading the word about the benefits of hiking on the Moraine. After our wedding we were a team in all aspects from trail maintenance, hike leading almost every second week and leading an End2End series, reaching out to new Canadian groups and discussing options to get more people involved in hiking- especially as they retired.

One of those major events that brought ORTA members together and publicized our wonderful trail was the Moraine Adventure Relay. Harold Sellers initiated the event and we were excited to be part of the team who continued it on. We are so glad to see it resurrected after the gap during Covid years. It has brought over a hundred ORTA members together each year and has introduced hundreds of participants to the forests, meadows and trails along the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. Thanks Jeremy, Jacqueline and your teams of supporters.



Wilma has kept the Discovery Night speaker series alive, currently with an assist from Scott, Heather and John, for ORTA members and the public to learn more about the trail and our environment and the travels of our

members. My, how members like to chat before the official speaker begins- but that's part of the reason for the night, and we hope someone will step forward to continue the series after this season. Another important event we helped initiate was the annual Rendezvous series of hikes and potluck social held each year in Uxbridge. The idea was to give members another opportunity to mingle and share stories over a delicious lunch after a morning of hiking. Hike leaders would lead treks in the area at various speeds and distances, then all join the lunch time fun, see some pictures of hikes gone by and reminisce. This past year Anna added

some fun to the day with brain teasers at each table (and she brought the whole family to help).

This all may sound like a history of ORTA, but that's how it feels too as we look back over the past 25years. We still look forward to leading or joining hikes, and to helping with some of the trail maintenance, but we know the organization is in good hands for the future. Thank you Oak Ridges Trail Members for sharing the trails and contributing to our journey.

Keep on Trekking, Wilma and Brian

ORTA Volunteers Needed for Uxbridge Trails Celebration Day — June 6

The Township of Uxbridge has invited ORTA to join their **Trails Celebration Day** at Elgin Park on **June 6 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.**, and we're excited to participate! This is a great opportunity to share what you love about the Oak Ridges Trail with the community.

We're looking for volunteers to help at our booth for 30-60 minutes.

You don't need to be an expert — simply share your own experiences. Whether you're a hike leader, hiker, trail maintainer, Discovery Night attendee, or someone who loves walking the Oak Ridges Moraine, your

stories matter. We'll have the booth set up, and you'll always be paired with fellow ORTA members — no one will be on their own.

Last year many wonderful volunteers — Lissa, Joanne, Heather, Anna, Karen, Bruce, Cathy, Noel, and others — helped at events and enjoyed connecting with new people who love the outdoors as much as we do.

If you can offer an hour or two, we'd love to have you.

Please contact: publicity@oakridgestrail.org



The Oak Ridges Trail Association's
Annual Fundraiser
Saturday June 13, 2026

Join Us at the Annual General Meeting

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

'Doors open at 6:30 pm. Come out early for some social time with old and new acquaintances. The refreshments will be ready for you!'

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.

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

Lead the Way: Help Grow Our Volunteer Trail Community

As we work together to protect the integrity of the Oak Ridges Moraine, our local chapters are the vital link between our mission and the trails we love. To keep the Oak Ridges Trail thriving—from Albion Hills to the Northumberland Forest—we're looking for dedicated leaders to serve as the key point of contact for regional volunteer teams.

We are currently seeking organized, community-minded volunteers to step into Chapter Chair and Co-Chair roles. This is a great fit for someone who wants to help keep the trail a valued community asset, build on the legacy of what's been created, shape what comes next, and enjoy bringing people together around a shared purpose.

Vacancies: Help Lead These Regions

We have an immediate need for volunteer leadership in the following chapters:

- Caledon - (Chapter Chair)
- Clarington - (Chapter Chair)
- Northumberland - (Chapter Chair)
- Uxbridge - (Co-Chair)

The Role: Leader, Coordinator, and Liaison

The Chapter Chair isn't necessarily the person swinging the tools; instead, you help make the work possible by coordinating people, communication, and follow-through across your region.

Key responsibilities include:

- Recruit and mentor Trail Captains, ensuring each section of the trail has a dedicated steward.
- Serve as the primary liaison between local volunteers, other Chapter Chairs, the Trail Director, and ORTA.
- Coordinate semi-annual trail inspections (spring/fall) and help ensure your team has the supplies they need.
- Promote a strong safety culture by sharing safety protocols and reporting hazardous conditions promptly to the appropriate authorities.
- Connect with local conservation or forest authorities to report hazards and support trail health and expansion.

Who Are We Looking For?

This role is a great fit for someone with strong communication, organization, and interpersonal skills. If you're comfortable sending emails, leading a small team, and keeping them motivated and informed, you already have what you need to succeed.

You don't need to be a trail maintenance expert—you just need the interest to lead and support the people who are. We'll provide the ORTA Guide for Trail Maintenance, along with support from the Trail Director, to help you get started with confidence. Ready to Step Up?



Help strengthen our volunteer leadership network and keep the Oak Ridges Trail a premier nature destination for generations to come.

To apply—or to learn more about what's needed in Caledon, Clarington, Northumberland, or Uxbridge—please email trails@oakridgestrail.org.

Welcoming the Greenbelt Foundation to the Trail!

We're excited to introduce you to our partners at the Greenbelt Foundation, who are working alongside us to shape the next chapter of the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail. As fellow hikers, you know firsthand what the Foundation is dedicated to protecting. From the rugged cliffs of the Niagara Escarpment to the rolling hills and forests of the Moraine, trails connect these beautiful landscapes and give everyone the chance to get outside and enjoy nature.

Meet the Greenbelt team helping us revitalize and enhance the Trail:

Shelley is the Director of Research and Policy at the

Foundation. She has cycled and hiked many parts of the Moraine, visiting the towns and shops along the way.



Visiting Glen Major Forest during spring to view the trilliums

is a highlight along with a visit to the Ecology Centre at the Alderville First Nation Black Oak Savanna preserve.

Megan is a manager at the Greenbelt Foundation. She's passionate about preserving nature and loves capturing it through photography. Her most recent ORMT adventure was in the Ganaraska Forest, and her go-to spot is the Secord Forest. She's excited to explore other segments of the Trail this year.



Megan

Samantha is a coordinator at the Greenbelt Foundation. She's passionate about the outdoors, loves an early start on the trail, and is excited to try her hand at trail running this summer. She can't wait to hit the trails this season!

With the help of the Greenbelt Foundation, we are

making sure the Trail remains a place where you can soak up fresh air, take in those stunning views, and enjoy all the natural beauty the Moraine has to offer. The Greenbelt team will also be helping at the Adventure Relay Trail Hub checkpoint. Be sure to stop and say hello!



Samantha

President's Message – Spring Edition of Trail Talk

By the time this newsletter is published, we will be only six or seven weeks away from the Oak Ridges Moraine Adventure Relay. I encourage everyone, if possible, to rally around Jacquelin Heirchert and Tomasz Solkowski as they lead key pieces of this major event.

Jacquelin has generously stepped up as Race Director, and there may be small tasks or gaps she needs help filling as we get closer to June 13th. Your support will make a meaningful difference in ensuring a smooth and successful relay.

At the same time, Tomasz—along with our Chapter Chairs, Trail Captains, and dedicated trail maintenance volunteers—is working hard to complete both the usual spring inspections and the additional trail preparations needed before the relay. If he needs help on a section that may not be closest to home, I encourage you to consider lending a hand. Many small contributions add up to a big impact.

Lastly, we continue to need additional hike leaders, especially on Mondays and potentially other days of the week. If you've been thinking about becoming a hike leader, please consider offering even one hike a month, or six hikes a year. Every new leader strengthens our program and helps ensure we have a resilient schedule backed by members trained in both hike leadership and first aid.

Thank you for everything you do to support the trail, our volunteers, and the ORTA community. I hope to see many of you out enjoying the Moraine this spring.

With appreciation,

Karen Graham
President, Oak Ridges Trail Association



