



AvonTrail.ca



ANNUAL REPORT

2018

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The Avon Trail
Annual General Meeting Minutes
November 21, 2017

Present: 31 members

1. Jane Foster, VP called the meeting to order and welcomed members.
2. **Agenda** – M/S Maria Antonio, Dudley Burton that the Agenda be adopted as presented. Carried.
3. **Minutes of the AGM November 15, 2016** – M/S Carolyn Goward, Bruce Graham that the minutes be accepted as presented. Carried.
4. President's Comments, Bernard Goward
 - Thanks to all the volunteers for their dedicated service and support
 - Thanks to Donna Weitzel and Frances Williams for the slide show before the meeting.
 - Annual Report - a print copy is available and it is also on our website/Resources
 - Bernard commented on 9 slides from 2017 – family hike, Leader Certification seminar, Edition 7.5 Avon Trail Guide published, Canada 150 Challenge, new tool shed, Plaque at junction of Thames Valley and Avon Trail in St. Marys, new mobile-friendly website, 7k of new, off-road trail east of Amulree and along the Nith Valley, 2nd Annual Wildwood Challenge

5. Financial Report as of October 31, 2017, Maria Antonio:

Opening Balance Nov 1, 2016	5 897.92
Closing Balance Oct 31, 2017	8 877.30
Surplus(Deficit)	2 979.38

Total Revenues	18 815.18
Total expenses	15 835.80

\$5 000.00 was put into a Gic for 1 year.

6. Thanks to:
 - Ken Nicholson who has agreed to be Trail Coordinator
 - Liz McNally who has retired as a Trail Monitor after many years of service to the club
 - Sharon Zehr of szoomdesign, who designed our new website and volunteered her time to train our web team.
 - Certificates of thanks were given to Carolyn Goward, membership secretary for her help developing the membership function of our website; to Terry Aitken for his efforts contacting landowners and getting permission for more Trail off-road and to Bruce Graham for superb organization of 2 long-distance hikes for our members.
 - Jamie Hember was given a plaque and an Honourary Life Membership for his years of service to the club and for 10 years as our volunteer web-master.
 - Terry Aitken expressed thanks to Bernard for his selfless service to the club as President.

7. Report of the Nominating Committee

Bernard thanked the members of the board who served in 2016 – 2017.

Officers for 2017- 2018

- * President, Bernard Goward for a 2-year term
- Vice-president, Carol Miller second year of a 2-year term
- Treasurer, Maria Antonio second year of a 2-year term

- Secretary, Carolyn Goward second year of a 2-year term
- * Director, Jane Foster for a 2-year term
- * Director, Terry Aitken for a 2-year term
- * Director, Donna Weitzel for a 1-year term
- * Director, Meg Wesley for a 2-year term

M/S Dudley Burton, Ken Nicholson that nominations be closed.

M/S Donna, Terry that the officers marked with an asterisk be elected. Carried.

Tracy Halliwell agreed to attend some Board meetings and then decided if she wishes to serve as a Director.

8. Introduction to our website. Bernard used “screen captures” to explain how to use our new website and how to “join” the club on-line.

Two Comments:

1. for new members signing up, who determines their User Name? Is it assigned by the webmaster, or does each new member create their own User Name?
2. At the front end of the website there should be a statement as to the Benefits of Membership.

Motion to adjourn Donna Weitzel

A draw for an Avon Trail hat followed ... won by Wayne Kenny.

Refreshments were served. Thanks to Maria and Jane.

Carolyn Goward, secretary

President’s Annual Report, 2018

It’s been a good year for the Avon Trail due to a lot of people participating in a great team effort. We’ve hiked, maintained trails, built bridges, increased our public exposure, and looked after administration. A hearty thanks to all volunteers who love and enjoy the outdoors in the company of others.

The viability of the Trail is possible because of the generosity of our landowners who host our trail. Our heartfelt thanks! We added one new landowner this year, making a total of 86 who host the Avon Trail.

This year Brenda Tarr and Tom Kimber became co-editors of the Newsletter and took it ‘on-line’. They’ve done a stellar job. When, due to health reasons, Brenda stepped back, Tom stepped up!

Cindy Kimber has created and distributed posters promoting Family Hikes with great effect. Most recently, Susan Young has enhanced our Facebook presence.

Carol Miller, Vice-President, has created new marketing instruments: vertical and horizontal banners, flyer, and tear-off map of the Stratford Side Trail. Using professional graphics design services, she oversaw the creation of a new style guide for the Avon Trail logo.

The board contracted with RPA Photography to create a video depicting maintenance and hiking on the Avon Trail to promote the Trail with service clubs and other organizations.

The Third Annual Wildwood Challenge, organized by Bruce Graham, attracted a record number of 51 registrations and, despite an all-day drizzle, the event was a huge hit!

Aiming to attract younger walkers on the trail, the board engaged Ondago, a Quebec web developer of on-line trails, to create an 'app' of the Avon Trail. Launching this month, the app will be free to all.

Carolyn and I attended the Hike Ontario Summit, (Annual Meeting) in Orillia, hosted by the Ganaraska Hiking Club in conjunction with their 50th Anniversary. Part of the Summit, an Indigenous ceremony of Smudging and Blessing of Waters, was specially moving. Water had been carried in flasks relayed by hikers from the Port Hope trail head and Wasaga Beach trail end, meeting in Orillia.

Looking forward, goals include developing a greater exposure in the east end of the trail, seeking help with website managing and membership keeping, editing a new Trail Guide edition and adding four to six new trail monitors.

Wishing you all happy trails!

Bernard Goward
President, Avon Trail

"Of all the paths you take in life, make sure a few of them are dirt."
John Muir

Marketing/PR Report

2018 - a year of change and growth for the AvonTrail.ca beginning with:

- Research by President Bernard, in collaboration with Hike Ontario, resulting in our largest indoor project for your outdoor pleasure....We are pleased to offer a **FREE SmartPhone App for the AvonTrail, built by Ondago**, a Quebec based company specializing in trail apps. We are thrilled to have it active and ready for use.
- A rebranding of our logo and graphics. Moving forward we will be known as **AvonTrail.ca**, on all print and digital materials.
- A vertical display banner created with the assistance of club member Catherine Moffat.
- 5K newly branded single leaf brochures designed by CreativeFeats. Brochures have been distributed through tourism, B&B's and associated locations along the trail and at events we have attended.

Outreach included:

1. Presentation to **Stratford and Area Bed and Breakfast** members at their annual spring meeting. This is where it really hit home, that the vast majority of Stratfordites hadn't heard of the Avon Trail, let alone hiked any portion of it. Thus we began building a plan.
2. Several of us attended **familiarization tours** offered through tourism Perth and Stratford to help us become recognized within tourism circles. We participated in consumer shows, 'Go Wild, Grow Wild' in London, ON with Hike Ontario and 'In The Loop' in Stratford.

Working with CreativeFeats we have produced two Avon Trail banners to be used as needed for parades and events.

3. Sept 30 we participated in the **Wildwood Conservation Authority Annual Open house**. The Avon Trail goes through the Conservation Area, making this a natural fit.

4. October 27, club member Bruce Graham and team staged a very successful **3rd Annual Wildwood Challenge**, in spite of the weather. **Wildwood Challenge** is 22 km trail. It sold out this year with 51 registered participants! This is a fun, fundraising event.

5. We have taken advantage of our **Stratford Tourism Alliance membership** to display in their window one week in October and in June at the Riverside tourism location.

6. We created something old that's **NEW** again, a '**paper map**' of the **Stratford Side Trail**. This is a **FREE** map designed as an introduction to hiking. It's a side trail of the main AvonTrail.ca. The trail begins at the Forest Motel and ends at TJ Dolan Natural Area. These maps will be available Free at tourism outlets, hotels, the YMCA and the Health Unit.

7. We have applied for 3 Service Club signs in St Marys to be placed at the three entrances to the town.

8. A 3 minute video of the Trail, made by RPA Photography, will be used to promote the club's activities.

One of our newest members, Susan Young, has offered her expertise with Social Media...

- Facebook - our name has been updated to read AvonTrail.ca
- Susan has become one of the administrators for our Facebook page and will be setting up Instagram
- She will be giving us advice to keep our Trail top of mind. We want our 113 KM trail to be used. It helps keep the weeds down. So far she has been key in welcoming new online members and getting the word out for special events.

We have participated in **Parades**, we have offered hikes to children at Y camps, as well as family hikes which have grown in popularity.

Carol Miller
Vice-President, PR/Marketing

Membership Report to October 31, 2018

181 total Membership, October 31, 2018

49 are new members

12 are Honourary members

Shirley Gotts was given honorary membership in June, 2018, prior to her departure for Calgary.

52 have renewed for next year

29 have completed End-to-End hikes and ordered a badge.

In the fall of 2017 we launched on-line membership, facilitating the role of membership secretary and treasurer. There are still glitches to work out, so we are all learning patience and perseverance.

Carolyn Goward,
Membership secretary

Hikes & Events Report—November 2018

Looking back this past year, there has been a varied choice of hikes and activities for members and non-members of Avon Trail.

As hike scheduler, I worked with the hike leaders and our president to provide everyone with an appealing and educational selection of hikes sure to engage our hikers.

Tuesday Morning Rambles continue to be a popular element in the Schedule and I thank Terry Aitken for his leadership on the Rambles.

Last Winter we brought to hikers the choice of walking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing in efforts to continue to be in the outdoors despite the challenges of winter weather. The groups sometimes met spontaneously when snow conditions were good to ski. When winter was on the decline, we had a family hike in Wildwood Conservation Area on the Avon Trail, culminating at McCully's Hill Farm for a pancake breakfast and tour of the farm.

The Spring schedule included a migratory bird watch at Hullett's Marsh, an architectural tour of Mitchell and a Thames River hike, visiting an expansion of Hickson Rail Trail, and the study of flora on the Cedar Boardwalk hike, led by UTRCA specialist, Brenda Gallagher. A section of the Thames Valley Trail joining Avon Trail in St. Marys was traversed. Go to Blazes weekend brought out the need to maintain our trail for the enjoyment of all hikers.

Summer and early Fall saw hikers walking the Stratford cemetery to study locations of headstones of notable Stratford citizens, a family Hike along Trout creek, a visit to the Hickson Rail Trail followed by a corn roast social at the Campbell farm, Go to Blazes weekend, a hike at Grand Bend along the Ausable Channel, and a hike along a section of the Maitland Trail.

This Fall we visited the McNaughton-Morrison Trail near Exeter and enjoyed the Family Hike at camp Bimini along the Trail, explored the new Nith River loop addition and embraced the Third Annual Wildwood Challenge.

Two members, Edmund Thomas and Renee Lehnen successfully completed the course to qualify as a Certified Hike Leader, joining the twelve other certified hike leaders in the club. Our Hike Leaders hope that by providing a greater variety of hike length and terrain challenges, we can appeal to the needs and choices for our hikers.

I wish to thank all the Hike Leaders for their guidance and leadership within the organization. Without you, the schedule of hikes would not be possible to create.

I am stepping down as Hike Scheduler after three years in this role. Please join me in welcoming Meg Westley to this position as Hike Scheduler on the Board of Avon Trail.

Jane Foster
Hikes & Events, Scheduler

Landowner Liaison Officer Report

Most of my efforts in the past year have been directed toward creating more off-road trail, and so reducing the 8 plus km of unbroken road trail which currently exists in Wilmot Township. In this endeavour I have been ably assisted and constantly encouraged by superb supporters of the Avon Trail, Barb and Peter Wurtele. Indeed without their support I would probably have given up.

However it has been tough sledding with many refusals, mostly for good reasons. We did however have one fantastic breakthrough in late September, when Susan and Tom Schneider gave permission for a loop to be created around their organic farm on Carmel-Koch Road. I say created advisedly, because in reality these wonderful new landowners went round with a tractor towing a wide lawnmower, by means of which they virtually created the trail.

Bruce Graham and his assistants are making a valiant effort to get this blazed this year, but the weather in November is somewhat challenging. It is also closed mid-November till mid-April to allow for cross-country skiing.

Another highlight of the year was when landowner Jim Snyder, in spite of a severely disabling back condition, cheerfully conveyed us and all our materials by tractor and farm wagon down to the site of a new bridge construction on the Nith river loop. Please make use of the trail!

Terry Aitken,
Landowner Liaison Officer

Newsletter Report

Three newsletters were published in 2018 – March, June and November. Brenda Tarr and Tom Kimber are co-editors.

The editors and contributors strive to provide readers stories in both word and picture of Avon Trail hikes and events that take place during the year. As well, we aim to provide profiles of landowners in each edition.

The Newsletter is accessed via Avon Trail.ca website through either the Announcements or the Resources tab and membership is not necessary to view it. The newsletter is published on line using WordPress and made available to the public for viewing in Avon Trails.ca. We no longer have a PDF version of the newsletter.

WordPress works extremely well for online publishing. It provides a flexible tool for content capture and assembly. Links to open photos and other stories can be provided within the newsletter framework.

Many thanks to all contributors of both photos and stories. Your support is appreciated.

Tom Kimber,
Newsletter co-editor

Trail Coordinator Report

The past year has been a busy one with a core group of volunteers who meet for breakfast at Two Gals & A Diner, Friday mornings and then depending on the weather, do jobs such as installing and repairing stiles, bridges and posts, removing tree-fall, blazing, brush cutting and spraying for toxic weeds. There has been an upgrade to the design of our stiles. Manufactured by Dennis, Ted and Dudley on Wednesday mornings at Rick Horst's workshop, the stile kits are then assembled 'in situ'. Early spring saw a wind storm go over our region which necessitated several reroutes around fallen trees, chainsaw work which is mainly done by Wayne and Ron with the assistance on occasion of some of our landowners.

Grass cutting seems to be something which we never catch up on. Between the mosquitos and the heat there is a concerted effort by nature to try to deter us from these jobs.

There have been a number of bridges manufactured, repaired, replaced and or removed where they were not needed, all done by our volunteers with the assistance of some of the farmers with their tractors.

The past year has been challenging what with trying to keep our various tools in operating order. Some of them have turned out to be not as robust as they should be, the BearCats, which are the wheeled grass trimmers come to mind quickly.

Bruce Graham seems to be on various parts of the trail weekly to let us know where there are improvements to be made. Terry Aitken has been tireless in trying to gain access to more off-road trails. All our volunteers try their best to keep up the trail. I haven't yet mentioned anything about the various members who have agreed to take on sections of the trail to monitor and maintain them¹. I thank them all.

Total hours submitted by Trail Maintenance Crew - 307.5 hours²

Ken Nicholson,
Trail Coordinator.



LADDER STILE



STEP STILE

¹ See Bruce Graham's Trail Monitor Captain report, following

² Add approximately 100 hours for work done but not reported to Trail Coordinator

Trail Monitor Captain Report

The main trail, St. Marys to Conestogo, is divided into 27 sections (2017: 21). In addition there are two side trails that are divided into 4 sections. During 2018, 50 people (2017: 36) acted as Monitors along the path with some of these monitoring multiple sections. Where the path passes through Wildwood Conservation Area, (Km 8.7 to 18.5) the trail is maintained entirely by Wildwood staff and is not counted as a 'section' of the Avon Trail.

Twelve new Monitors joined the club during the 2018 season.

As of October 31, 2018, two Monitors have retired leaving two sections without Monitors. A third section has been developed at time of writing. Being that the Trail Captain and 'floater' volunteers are temporarily covering these sections, the club requires an additional six new people to act as Monitors during the 2019 season.

During the period ending October 31, 2018, 86 Monitor reports were received (2017:89). This was comprised of 47 in Spring and 39 in Fall. Monitors reported a total of 347 hours volunteering on the trail for the season ending October 31 (2017:465). The lower numbers are in part due to 2017's trail building projects which did not occur in 2018.

The most common problem reported by Monitors was tall grass. Progress has been made when comparing to 2017, but it is still a challenge to get regular cutting of problem areas. During the 2018 season, and particularly in spring, many tree-falls were reported and the club managed to either cut the obstructing timber or re-route around the problem.

Blazing on the path continues to improve along the trail. Problem areas have been reported by walkers and corrected. Although this continues to be a "work-in-progress", the over-blazing along the trail has been reduced and blaze positioning has largely become consistent.

New fixtures added during 2018 (bridge plus stiles) have also improved the trail's safety and accessibility.

Overall, the trail is in good shape. The contributions of the Maintenance Crew volunteers have been professional and timely. New and veteran Monitors have shown enthusiasm and initiative and have made the Avon Trail a joy to walk on.

Bruce Graham
Trail Monitor Captain.

On the following pages, please find:
Financial Year-end Statement, October 31, 2018
Budget 2018-2019
Fixture Inventory

Fixtures on the Avon Trail,

Stiles			21
	Step-stiles	11	
	Ladder stiles	10	
Bridges			14
	Handrail	8	
	No handrail	6	
Boardwalk			1
	Panels	100*	
Plaques			2
Benches			2
Barrier			1
Un-installed	Step stiles		2
	Bridges		2

*estimated

Replacement costs (estimate)

Stiles	Ladder/step	21	\$100	\$2,100
Bridges	Handrail	8	\$700	\$5,600
	No handrail	6	\$200	\$1,200
Boardwalk	Panels	100	\$100	\$10,000
	Corners	25	\$11	\$275
Plaques**		2	\$600	\$1,200

Total				\$20,375
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* Replacements costs as estimated by Dennis Rawe October 2018

**estimate

Bruce Graham,
Trail Monitor Captain



