



## **ANNUAL REPORT**

**November 19, 2019**

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## President's Message

We have had a robust year on the Avon Trail.

Memberships and volunteerism have increased, off-road trail increased, bridges and stiles upgraded, signage improved, a diversity of hikes offered, and new equipment purchased. The website continues to improve and the Avon Trail Tales Newsletter now resides on the website. Our February Social at the Queen's Hotel attracted an enthusiastic crowd, a calendar was produced for our landowners, the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Wildwood Challenge fundraiser drew over 50 hikers, and in spite of a deficit budget, our finances continued to be healthy. You will read details of these and more in the pages that follow.

The board adopted three goals this year. The first, to increase the Trail's presence in the 'East End', second, to review our Strategic Plan, and third to revise our printed Trail Guide. The 'East End Meet 'n Greet' held in April at Riversong Bakery, St. Jacobs, attracted more than thirty people some of whom have become members and volunteers. In May Geoff Williams led us through a revision of our Strategic Plan, now posted on the website ([avontrail.ca/Resources/Governance](http://avontrail.ca/Resources/Governance)). This Plan will guide the board in the next five years. Third, with the invaluable assistance of Jamie Hember, we revised the Avon Trail Guide including six re-routes, adding an additional eight kilometers to the trail while reducing road walking significantly.



Environmental Impact



Developing policies and building programs to reduce our environmental impact since 1991

We also launched a free trail 'app' on the Ondago platform. Our goal was to reach a younger demographic. We were grateful to the **Royal Bank Environmental Impact Grant** that assisted with this project. We will monitor this venture to

determine how the app impacts the sale of trail guides.

Our request to the **Stratford Perth Community Foundation** to fund two projects was successful: first, to assist with annual maintenance fees of both the website and the Ondago app, secondly, to assist in the purchase of a new brushcutter for the east end.



STRATFORD PERTH  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

*The **Website and Trail App Maintenance Fee** project is supported by a grant from the **Smart & Caring Community Fund** for the amount of \$700.*

*The **Stihl Brushcutter** is supported by a grant from the **Mansbridge Environment Fund** and the **Smart & Caring Community Fund** for the amount of \$550.*

We are grateful to the Smart & Caring Fund and the Mansbridge Environment Fund for this support. Both funds are held within the **Stratford Perth Community Foundation**. We appreciate this vote of confidence in these Avon Trail projects.

We look forward to celebrating the 45<sup>th</sup> Anniversary year of the Avon Trail in 2020; it will be a year of challenge and change. I have been honoured to serve as president for four years alongside a stellar group of individuals who have made up the board, as well as many other enthusiastic volunteers. I know the club is in good hands going forward.

*Bernard Goward*  
*President*

## **Marketing Report**

We have enjoyed another busy year, outside or rather inside of hiking...

**WEBSITE** this tool continues to be well used by members and visitors alike. Sharon Zehr of Zoom Marketing remains our webmaster and continues to guide us to a dynamic website. Several of our members provide regular posts for the newsletter, hike schedules, reminders of upcoming hikes and photos. Maintaining a website is a big job shared by volunteers and our webmaster.

**Brochures** are still being well used and in particular the Stratford Side Trail map is popular with Stratford visitors. A very well attended meeting was held at the Forest Motel by the very supportive owner and our member, Conrad.

**An East End Social** was held in St Jacobs in April to encourage ownership and participation in the 120KM Avon Trail. Attendance was good and interest high. However, more awareness and participation at the east end of the trail is always welcome.

**Wildwood Challenge** fundraiser hike in October was again successful with 52 hikers participating! Well done Bruce Graham and Tracy Halliwell for organizing.

**Trade Shows ..Go Wild Grow Wild in London** we had a booth and felt it would be worth doing again next year in April.

**In the Loop** in Stratford was also attended.

**New BADGES** for the End to End, and Wildwood Challenge were offered this year and well received.

**Permanent Avon Trail Gateway Signs** were installed in St Marys at the 4 entrances to the town

**AvonTrail calendars** for 2020, our 45th year, have been created and printed..99 were given to our landowners who allow us to hike their property. They may also be ordered at \$12

**Ondago Trail App** continues to be well used. As of October, there had been over 4000 downloads since launching in November, 2018.

**Social Media** while several members post on Facebook and Instagram we are still looking for a member to oversee these 2 platforms.

It has been a good **year for our club**. We have a terrific membership of like-minded individuals.

It has been my pleasure to work with all of you, thank you.

*Carol Miller*  
*Vice-President, PR/Marketing*

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**Membership Report** *as of October 31, 2019*

Total number of Memberships	139
Of which 49 are Family Memberships (Family Memberships count 2)	
<b>Total number of members</b>	<b>188<sup>1</sup></b>
Honourary members – active	5
- not active	<u>8</u>
Total Honourary members	13
Members who used the website to pay for their membership	85
21 hikers have completed an E2E and received a badge.	

*Carolyn Goward,  
Membership Secretary*

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**Hikes & Events Report**

It has been a full year of regular, impromptu and scheduled hikes and events at the Avon Trail. Terry Aitken’s ever-popular Rambles continued every Tuesday morning rain or shine, sleet or snow. During the winter months, snow-lovers were able to join both planned and spontaneous cross-country ski and snowshoe events. Some impromptu hikes also took place in the milder months, including at least one end-to-end of the trail.

Weekend hikes were scheduled, on average, 3 weekends each month. These included hikes on the Avon Trail as well as at Chesney Woods, Lobb Trail, Thames Valley Trail, Maitland Trail, Best of Bayfield, Bruce Trail and Fanshawe Lake Trail.

At last count, the Avon Trail now has fifteen trained hike leaders!

We also ran a number of successful events which provided participants with opportunities to socialize as well as get outdoors. The Family Maple Syrup event at McCully’s was a hit, as was the Christmas Lights Walk with refreshments at Molly Bloom’s. In the deep midwinter many joined the T.J. Dolan hike followed by Soup’s On and in August we had the pleasure of both the Wildwood Sailing Club Potluck & BBQ, and the first annual Monitor’s Meander. Good turnout on Go to Blazes weekends has helped keep the trail in great shape.

We held our members only February social (Show & Tell) at the Queen’s Inn, with snack food and cash bar: a highly enjoyable evening with excellent entertainment from our members.

Last but far from least, the sun shone and we had an amazing turnout for the fourth annual Wildwood Challenge in October, with 52 hikers completing the 22km walk.

*Meg Westley,  
Hikes & Events, Scheduler*

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<sup>1</sup> For Insurance purposes, an Adult membership counts 1, a Family membership counts 2

## **Landowner Report**

This past year has been very encouraging. At least 16 new landowners have been added, bringing the total close to 100. We know that the work of many monitors in maintaining the trail has resulted in good vibes from landowners. Some of our new landowners have actually helped to maintain the trail.

Significant new routes in this past year have included trail on either side of the Nith, a breakthrough in the Little Lakes area that gets us off highway 7/8 and Forest Road, a tunnel backbreakingly created over 5 days by differing teams of chainsaw operators and their helpers through the bush south of line 29 which has got us off a lot of field edge, and most recently we have been able to get off the quarry road on Joe Bell's property south and west of Amulree.

On Friday Nov. 8 three of us explored a route through N-W Waterloo with a city trails official. If it is approved by Waterloo City Council, it will get us off the busy and almost shoulderless Conservation Drive. This, together with getting a bridge over the Bamberg Creek in Wilmot Township, and extending the new St. Marys Diversion eastward in Spring 2020, are on our agenda for 2020. I don't think relations with landowners have ever been better. Every one of them has received a specially created 2020 Avon Trail calendar, and the remainder of these hot items are available for sale to members and friends - a perfect stocking filler for only \$12!

*Terry Aitken,  
Landowner Liaison Officer*

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## **Newsletter Report**

Accomplishments in 2019: Newsletters/News Briefs published with links to the Avon Trail webpage

Three Newsletters/News Briefs editions thus far in 2019:

Edition 1 – March – News Briefs

Edition 2 – June - Newsletter

Edition 3 – September – Newsletter

It would be nice to time the release of the Newsletter to the release of new Hike Schedule for each season.

Edition 4 will be published when the winter Hike Schedule is ready. I would need to be kept informed so that the link could be added to the Newsletter. Edition 4 will be published in November.

Also, content for the Newsletter from other members/contributors is always welcome  
([avontrailnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:avontrailnewsletter@gmail.com))

*Tom Kimber,  
Newsletter editor*

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**Trail Report** *as of October 31, 2019*

The main trail, St Marys to Connestogo, is divided into 28 Sections (2018: 27). In addition there are side trails that are divided into 5 Sections (2018: 4). During 2019, 60 people (2018: 50/2017: 36) acted as Monitors along the path with some of these monitoring multiple sections. Where the path passes through Wildwood Conservation Area, km 12.2 to 22.0, it is maintained entirely by Wildwood staff and is not counted as a “section” of the Avon Trail.

Nineteen new Monitors joined the club during the 2019 season

At October 31, 2019, 4 Monitors have retired and two sections are without Monitors. I expect a further section to come available by spring so that the club requires an additional 6 new people to act as Monitors during the 2020 season.

Given the increase in Monitors the Trail Captain will need administrative assistance going forward.

During the period ending October 31, 2019, 87 Monitor reports were received (2017: 88). Monitors reported a total of 593 hours worked on the trail for season ending October 31, 2018 (2018: 373). This number includes trail building hours performed by Monitors.

The most common problem reported by Monitors was tall grass. Progress has been made when comparing to 2018 but it is still a challenge to get regular cutting of problem areas. Several Monitors assisted with grass cutting but the club needs more volunteers to keep pace with the robust grassy bits along the trail.

Blazing on the path continues to improve along the trail. Focus in 2019 has been to produce consistent rectangular blazes from end to end. Many Monitors and other volunteers have “bought in” to this concept.

New fixtures added during 2019 (4 bridges, 7 step-stiles) have also improved the trail’s safety and accessibility.

Overall, the trail is in good shape. The contributions of the Maintenance volunteers has 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 Captain.*

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## **Avon Trail Board 2018-19**

President Bernard Goward

Vice-President – Carol Miller

Secretary – Carolyn Goward

Treasurer – Maria Antonio

Directors – Terry Aitken (Landowner Relations)

Donna Weitzel (Web Photo Gallery)

Jane Foster (Family Hikes)

Meg Westley (Hike Schedule)

Tracy Halliwell (Wildwood Challenge)

Ted Derry (Maintenance, Construction)

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## **AVON TRAIL STRATEGIC PLAN – 2019-2024**

**Vision** – Connect with Nature; Enjoy a Country Walk

**Mission** – A Safe System of Footpaths Joining St. Marys and Conestogo

### **Values -**

- a. safe and enjoyable hiking experiences for all.
- b. strong relationships and partnerships with landowners.
- c. its members, meeting their priorities and addressing their concerns.
- d. its new members, encouraging them to actively engage with the Association.
- e. good governance and strong fiscal management.
- f. effective communication with members, and all stakeholders.
- g. building strong partnerships with other community organizations, trail associations, and Hike Ontario.
- h. its volunteers, and commits to providing them with support and feedback.

### **Priority Areas:**

- a. Serving our Members  
Actions
  1. Welcome package / greeting letter for new members
  2. Wide variety of hikes (Rambles, evenings, longer weekend hikes, overnight hikes – destinations)
  3. Appreciation for monitors and maintenance volunteers
  4. Social activities
  5. Maps
  6. Newsletters
  7. Strengthening the East End

b. Building a Safe and Interesting Trail  
Actions

1. Monitors
2. Maintenance
3. Training for monitors and maintenance volunteers
4. Landowner relations
5. Moving more of the trail off-road
6. Developing the east end
7. Municipal partnerships
8. Opt-out fee (i.e. differentiated membership fee based on volunteering or not)
9. Identifying areas of specific interest

c. Strengthening our Organization  
Actions

1. Increased volunteer base
2. Marketing
3. Publicity – radio, print, media relations
4. Social media presence
5. Fundraising
6. Grants
7. Board member workshops
8. Board member orientation
9. East end board members

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