

AVON TRAIL



ANNUAL REPORT – 19 November 2024

Photo by Lilla Fodor

Avon Trail Annual Report – 19 November 2024

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A) Avon Trail - Annual General Meeting Minutes - 2023

Avon Trail Annual General Meeting 2023

Date and Time: 21 November 2023, 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

Location: Army, Navy, and Air Force Veterans' Hall, 151 Lorne Avenue East, Stratford, Ontario

Attendance: 46 people

1. Welcome by Bruce Graham, President

2. Adoption of Agenda: Motion to accept the Annual General Meeting (AGM) Agenda – Justin Innes/Maria Antonio, carried.

3. Guest Speaker: Alana Respondek spoke on the topic of Invasive Plant Species. Bruce Graham gave Alana a thank you gift for her work in offering members a fascinating presentation.

4. Commendation/Recognition:

Bruce Graham led all assembled in recognizing the late Pat Feryn for his service to Avon Trail (AT).

Bruce presented a gift to Clive Clark in appreciation of his work as Ondago coordinator.

Bruce presented the Distinguished Monitor Award to Wayne and Carol Kenny. Wayne was present to receive their certificate.

Bruce awarded honorary, lifetime memberships to Bernard and Carolyn Goward for their contributions to AT. Bernard was present to receive the award.

Bruce thanked trail auditors Ron Schier and Ed Pass with certificates and end-to-end trail badges for their hard work.

5. Approval of minutes of AGM on 22 November 2022 – Alana Respondek/Jane Foster, carried.

6. The Year in Review: All reports delivered at the AGM can be found in the Avon Trail Annual Report 2023.

A) President's Report: Bruce Graham delivered the President's Report.

B) Vice President's Report: Tracy Halliwell delivered the Vice President's report and announced that AT will hold a Members' Social Meeting on 27 February 2024.

C) Treasurer's Reports: Justin Innes delivered the Budget Comparison and Financial Statement for the fiscal year ending 31 October 2023.

D) Membership Report: Bruce Graham delivered the Membership Report on behalf of Membership Secretary, Noreen Ollivier.

E) Trail Map Coordinator's Report: David Parratt delivered the Trail Map Coordinator's Report.

F) Trail Captain and Maintenance Reports: Bruce Graham delivered the Trail Captain's and Maintenance Reports. Bruce asked that members consider volunteering to be trail captain or to coordinate trail maintenance.

G) Landowner Relations: Bruce Graham delivered the Landowner Relations Report. Bruce has been acting in this role and asked that members consider volunteering in landowner relations.

H) Hike Scheduler's Report: Melissa Winkler delivered the Hike Scheduler's Report. Melissa asked that hike leaders share the responsibility for Tuesday Rambles.

I) Marketing/Public Relations: Bruce Graham delivered the Marketing/Public Relations Report on behalf of Martha Manning.

J) Store Report: Cindy Kimber delivered the Store Report.

K) Newsletter and Website: Tom Kimber delivered the Newsletter Report and Website Reports.

L) Constitution Committee Report: Renee Lehnen and Alana Respondek delivered the Constitution Committee Report.

7. Constitutional Amendments:

Renee Lehnen stated that to be compliant with the *Ontario Non-Profit Corporations Act* which comes into effect in October 2024, AT must amend its Constitution.

Motions to adopt the following amendments to the AT Constitution:

- **Change the word "Article" to "Bylaw" – Andy Krantz/Donna Weitzel, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 4. D. Each adult in a family membership will have one vote at members' meetings and the Annual General Meeting if present. – Bruce Graham/Andy Krantz, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 4. E. Any member who is found to be violating the Members' Code of Conduct will receive a written warning regarding their behaviour from the Board. If the member continues to act in violation of the Code of Conduct, the membership of this person will be cancelled without refund by the Board. – Tracy Halliwell/Donna Weitzel, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 5. A. Change to: The Executive will call members' meetings and will give 10 to 50 days advance notice of the time, date, and location of members' meetings including the Annual General Meeting. – Maria Antonio/Christine Lee, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 5. D. Any member may request a list of members' names with phone and/or email addresses for Avon Trail related business including: a) influencing**

how members vote; b) requesting a meeting of members; c) using it for other matters related to Avon Trail business only. The member will make such a request by filling out and submitting a declaration form. – Maria Antonio/Christine Lee, carried.

- **Article/Bylaw 5. E. Avon Trail will hold a members’ meeting upon the request of 10 percent or more of the membership. – Ross Campbell/Donna Weitzel, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 6. E. Directors on the Avon Trail Board must be fully paid-up members of Avon Trail. – Bruce Graham/Tracy Halliwell, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 6. F. The Board will appoint a Chair following the AGM for a one-year term. – Ross Campbell/Mary Maika, carried.**
- **Article/Bylaw 6. G. Any Director who is found to be violating the Directors’ Code of Conduct will receive a written warning regarding their behaviour from a majority of the Board. If the Director continues to act in violation of the Code of Conduct, they will be removed from the Board by a majority of Directors at a meeting called for that purpose. – Justin Innes/Cindy Kimber, carried.**

8. Election of Directors for Avon Trail Board 2023-2024:

Bruce Graham issued an invitation to the general membership to join the Board. No one volunteered or nominated another member. The 2022-2023 Board included the following members:

President: Bruce Graham (second year of two-year term)

Past President: Jane Foster (second year of two-year term)

Vice President: Tracy Halliwell (second year of two-year term)

Treasurer: Justin Innes (first year of two-year term)

Secretary: Renee Lehnen (second year of two-year term)

Director, Marketing and Public Relations: Martha Manning (first year of two-year term)

Director, Hike Scheduler: Melissa Winkler (first year of two-year term)

Director, Trail Map Coordinator: David Parratt (first year of two-year term)

Director: Alana Respondek (second year of two-year term)

Director: Christine Lee (first year of a two-year term)

Motion to maintain all current board members in their current roles on the AT Board in 2023-2024 – Cindy Kimber/Donna Weitzel, carried.

9. Budget for 2023-2024: Justin presented the Budget. **Motion to accept the Budget for 2023-2024 and the Treasurer’s Budget Comparison Report and Financial Statement of 31 October 2023 – Justin Innes/Tracy Halliwell, carried. See Appendix A.**

10. Next Annual General Meeting: Bruce Graham announced that the next Annual General Meeting will be held on 19 November 2024.

11. Motion to close the meeting – Alana Respondek/Jane Foster, carried.

Minutes recorded by Renee Lehnen, Board Secretary

B) President's Report

8 November 2024

Memo to: Avon Trail Board of Directors

From: Bruce Graham, President

I am writing to introduce the achievements of the many Directors and Members who have managed specific areas of the Avon Trail during the year ended October 31, 2023. The following pages include Reports by the aforementioned volunteers. I urge all Members to read these reports. The amount of work, dedication and creativity donated to the Avon Trail are understated.

Highlights from the Reports for year ended October 31, 2024:

- Received generous donations
- Avon Trail in good financial condition
- Membership is slightly increased
- New Hike Leaders are very active leading new interesting hikes
- The website has been updated and improved
- Maps, both printed and on Ondago are generally up to date
- New badges have been created and have sold well
- Held the 7th annual Wildwood Challenge
- Regular News Alerts sent to Members
- Tree planting along the Avon Trail in 2023 are alive
- The Constitution has been further updated to conform to ONCA
- New trails have been created
- Gained a seat on Stratford's Active Transportation Advisory Committee (ATAC)
- The Board continues to function well
- 2025 is the Avon Trail's 50th year and plans are in place to celebrate this incredible anniversary.
- Subsequent to year end we have received permission to blaze the Stratford Side Trail through Stratford.

I would also like to thank all other volunteers who have given their time to making the Avon Trail safe and enjoyable for other Members and for the walking public who use the trail.

Note

In January 2024 I advised the Board that I would be stepping back from my various roles with the Avon Trail. I have very much enjoyed my connection to the trail and all the wonderful people that I have met over the years. I never tire of walking the varied terrain in the varied weather encountered on the Avon Trail but its time for step aside and give new people a chance. 2024/25 will be my last year as President.

C) Vice President's Report

31 October 2024

Memo to The Avon Trail Board (for AGM on Nov. 19, 2024)

From: Tracy Halliwell, Vice President

REPORT

New Waiver for 2024 Wildwood Challenge completed.

Incident Reporting Form: Footnote added with wording: "If incident involves medical attention, then report must be sent to Hike Ontario".

New Badges designed and received:

- Avon Trail Badge
- Wildwood Challenge 2024
- 50th Anniversary End to End
- 50 Years on the Avon Trail
- Side Trails badge

Note: Badges were a combined effort of Tracy H., Clive Clark, and Matthew Gubernat (with his imaginative & creative graphic design work).

Wildwood Challenge 2024:

- Had a record number of participants. 94 registered. 72 hiked (Cancellations and No Shows due to illness, car trouble, etc.)
- Raised \$2000 for the club. This event also helped support Wildwood Conservation Area (UTRCA).
- A huge success once more, thanks to our many on-site & off-site volunteers: Bruce G., Tom K., Cindy K., Clive C., Phil A., Linda W., Gloria H., Julia V., Donna W., Christine L., Rose B., Edie F., Jason F., Dana K., Noreen O., Carol M., Brenda T., Jane F., Jamie G., and Tracy H.

info@avontrail.ca: our email address used for general inquiries is monitored regularly.

Post office box: checked regularly (by Justin, Bruce and Tracy). A few donations and membership renewals still come through Canada Post.

Several donations made in memory of Mavis Kerr.

New Badges:

Does anyone have this badge?



*D) Membership Report***AVON TRAIL MEMBERSHIP REPORT #2 as at October 31, 2024**

Memberships at Oct 31,2024	Individuals	At October 31, 2023
97 Adult	97	70
55 Family	110	112
13 Honorary Adult	13	14
3 Honorary Family	6	Included in line above
168 Memberships	229 Individuals	196 Individuals

NOTES:

During the last fiscal year eleven memberships were paid in cash or by cheque, rather than on-line through the Avon Trail Website

There is an issue whereby the system does not always automatically update the membership list even though payment is made on-line and a receipt issued. The webmaster is working to resolve this inconsistency.

Submitted by:

Noreen Ollivier, Membership Secretary

November 4, 2024

E) Trail Map Coordinator's Report

TRAIL MAP COORDINATOR ANNUAL REPORT - NOV 2024

The membership of the Avon Trail now cares for the 130 km long main Avon Trail along with 32 km of side trails. The goal of the Trail Map Coordinator is to have both our Printable Maps and the Ondago Interactive Map up to date and accurate.

Mapping Activity in 2024

January

QE2 loop added to the QE1 loop mapped in 2023

Updated Stratford Side Trail incorporating minor changes to the side trail and adding some secondary paths within TJ Dolan Area

August

Minor reroutes of the trail east of Road 108 and west of Road 106

Mapped new connecting trail between Periwinkle and Harmony Loops which resulted in removal of about 4 km of road walking

Released edition 9.6 of our Printable Maps

October/November

Updates to Map 1 (no parking Hwy 7, picnic table Km 4.9)

Map 3 (reroute to avoid cow parsnip on Trout Creek Link)

Map 7 (created Nith Valley Link along Berlett's Rd to form 6.3 km Nith Valley

Loop)

Released edition 9.7 of Printable Maps

Edition 9.6 and 9.7 of the Avon Trail Guide are available free to guide purchasers from 2023 and 2024.

Submitted,

David Parratt

F) Trail Captain's Report

November 8, 2024

Memo to: Avon Trail Board of Directors

From : Bruce Graham, Trail Captain

Trail make up at October 31, 2024

The Avon Trail, St Marys to Conestogo, measures 129.7 km on the main trail and 11.0 km of Avon Trail managed side trails.

Monitors

The Avon Trail is divided into 33 sections. Each section is monitored by two AT volunteer members. At October 31, 2024, five sections were without Monitors. Subsequent to year end three sections have acquired new Monitors. During 2023/24 where a section was unmonitored, or the Monitor failed to report, the Trail Captain or experienced volunteers monitor the section. During the period ending October 31, 2024 Monitor reports, spring and fall, were received for all sections. The new online reporting system created in early 2023 has worked perfectly.

The Avon Trail needs additional volunteers to assist with Monitoring sections near Stratford and in Wilmot.

Maintenance

Maintenance has been done throughout 2023/24. Work included repairing stiles, bridges and boardwalks; chainsaw work; tool repair; blazing; grass cutting; and section rehabilitation. Work was performed by the Maintenance crew almost weekly. Persons interested in helping with Maintenance are welcome to join; even only twice a year is still helpful. Contact info@avontrail.ca.

Timely grass cutting continues to be a challenge during the summer. A new self propelled lawn mower helped the crew during the summer heat. A third self propelled lawnmower will be acquired in 2025.

During 2024 our two chainsaw operators were re-certified. This course alerted the crew to several safety concerns. New safety equipment was acquired.

Construction

Building trail fixtures, such as bridges or boardwalks, and creating new trails is classified as Construction. One major project was expanding the Queen Elizabeth Loop. Another was the Trout Creek to Harmony re-route; this eliminated 3.75 km of roadwalking. Other projects included trail steps and trail leveling and new signage.

Tools

The Avon Trail owns trail maintenance tools, hammers and clippers, and grass cutting tools, such as lawnmowers. At year end the club owns 4 lawnmowers, 4 brushcutters (weed whackers). All are operational and professionally serviced. All are stored in the club's shed in Stratford with the exception of one chop saw located in a nearby woodwork shop.

Summary

The Avon Trail is in very good shape at time of writing: safe and easy to follow. The trail is in better condition today than it was 12 months ago.

Please note that many trail volunteers fulfill many roles. The energetic and cheerful volunteers who stepped up to assist during 2023/2024 are too many to list here but I thank each and every one of them.

G) Landowner Relations Report

November 8, 2024

Memo to: Avon Trail Board of Directors

From: Bruce Graham, Landowners Relations (acting)

During the year ended October 31, 2024 I have contacted several Landowners in the course of Maintenance and building new routes. Those that I have met have been very friendly and helpful. Landowners in the Trout Creek area have been very helpful in assisting with our re-routes as was a Landowner in the Nith River area.

There has been contact made by trail neighbours with concerns. These have been handled.

Given my other roles within the Avon Trail I have been unable to visit as many Landowners I would wish. The Avon Trail crosses dozens of privately owned property and these landowners' generosity is simply amazing. I hope that all hikers show their gratitude by not littering, picking up litter if spotted, not trampling crops and not foraging.

Subsequent to yearend a long-term Member and trail volunteer has expressed interest in assuming this role. Given this person's background and personality I am hoping that this is my last Landowner Relations Report!

H) Hike Schedule Coordinator's Report

31 October, 2024

Memo to: The Avon Trail Board of Directors

From: Tracy Halliwell, Hike Schedule Coordinator

We have 10 active Certified Hike Leaders: Bruce G., Jane F., Renee L., Maria A., Alana R., Geoff W., Christine L., Roland P., Linda W., Rose B., and Tracy H.

We have held many weekday and weekend hikes this year thanks to our enthusiastic group of leaders. These hikes have included The Avon Trail, an end to end on the Maitland Trail (4 outings), Burgess & South Shore trails, Morrison Dam/McNaughton trails, Huron County trails, Niagara Glen trails, Ellis Swamp trail, Goderich & Area trails, as well as an educational hike on the Walton Raceway grounds. We are hoping to hold more frequent weekend hikes in the future. Note: on Nov. 23rd, a hike on various Lambton Shores trails will be held.

Bruce organized a destination hike to Shropshire, England. A group of 7 had a very challenging and enjoyable hiking trip.

Tuesday Rambles continues to be a success with rotating leaders. Many thanks to our dedicated Rambles leaders: Jane, Bruce, Roland, Geoff, Linda, Christine, and Rose. Once per month we try to take Rambles to other locations within a 35-40 minute drive each way.

7th Annual Wildwood Challenge: see V.P. report.

Thank you to All!

I) Marketing and Public Relations Report

Marketing Chair Report
Prepared by Martha Manning
November 2024

- The Avon Trail continues to have a presence on social media, but this could be expanded in future: do you know of anyone with interests that include the Avon Trail and social media, we would love to connect with them- please reach out
- We are in the process of creating new paper-based advertising as this is a very popular medium in Stratford, St. Mary's and beyond
- We have been featured a couple times on StratfordToday.ca and will continue to source out local paper/media connections for future sharing about the trail.

J) Store Report

Avon Trail Store Report
Total Sales 2024
November 1, 2023 – October 31, 2024

Item	Total Sales	Total Revenue	Stock Remaining
Trail Guide	40	355	
Avon Trail Badges – (2 old style)	6	48	49
End-to-End Badge	22	294	35
6 th Annual Wildwood Challenge	93	3255	
Shipping (16) and Testing (6)		22	
Total	161	3974	

Notes:

30% decrease in Trail Guides sold year to year

30% decrease in End to End badges sold year to year

35% increase in Wildwood Challenge participation

Total sales were up 24% due to the increase in Wildwood Challenge participants.

In the next fiscal year three new badges will be added to the store: a 50th Anniversary Commemorative Badge, a special 50th Anniversary End-to-End Badge and a new Side Trails Badge.

Respectfully submitted,
Cindy Kimber, Shopkeeper

K) Newsletter Report

This past year (November 1, 2023, through October 31, 2024), 11 Avon Trail News Alerts were issued to membership and subscribers through webmail. Many stories are time sensitive so issuing them through News Alerts is more effective than through a quarterly newsletter. The stories contained in the news alerts keep members informed of conditions on the trails. Readers are reminded of leader led hikes including Tuesday Rambles for members and non-members to join. This is also how members are alerted to Columbia Store sales and what a member needs to gain access. Changes to the trail are presented in stories such as new side trails and re-routes on existing sections. More than 37 stories were published this year. Much like the newsletter, the stories in News Alerts are accessed through the Avon Trail website. AvonTrail.ca remains the best way to stay informed about the trail.

Regards, Tom Kimber, News

L) Website Report

We rely on the website to keep members informed of breaking club news and events that might be of interest. The Shop continues to provide members with means to make badge and printable map purchases. The Shop is used for special events such as the Wildwood Challenge to manage the entries to the event. The EVENTS CALENDAR is updated regularly with information for members. The green Buttons that appear along the right side of the screen allow for easy access to features that help promote the trail – Trail Alerts, Printable Maps, Interactive Maps, Donate and Before You Hike.

Some troubling problems have occurred with membership renewals. These problems require time to isolate and resolve. The club's IT consultant has recommended that a complete audit be performed on the website to make improvements in speed and performance. Sharon Zehr of ZoomDesign is assisting in this audit. Members can continue to access and manage their personal information data and access membership resources through the WELCOME RIBBON. Many thanks to Donna Weitzel for her contributions on The EVENT CALENDAR and PHOTO GALLERY.

Regards, Tom Kimber, website co-ordinator 2024

M) Constitution Committee's Report

In 2023, the members of the constitution committee, Martha Manning, Alana Respondek, and Renee Lehen, reviewed AT's bylaws and practices to identify gaps in compliance with the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) which came into effect in October this year. Several amendments were made to AT's constitution at the 2023 AGM.

This year, the committee conducted another review to ensure that AT's governance is fully aligned with ONCA. AT now keeps minutes for all committee meetings along with board meeting minutes, as required per ONCA. In addition, the committee is proposing further amendments to the constitution, to be addressed at the 2024 AGM.

In 2024/25, AT's board will also investigate ways to securely store AT's documents electronically, in accordance with ONCA.

Report compiled by Renee Lehen

N) Board Members of 2023/2024

Executive:

President: Bruce Graham

Vice President: Tracy Halliwell

Recording Secretary: Renee Lehen

Treasurer: Justin Innes

Past President: Jane Foster

Directors:

Martha Manning, Marketing/Public Relations

Dave Parratt, Trail Map Coordinator

Tracy Halliwell, Hike Schedule Coordinator

Christine Lee

Alana Respondek

Melissa Winkler (leaving board)

Annual Report compiled by Renee Lehen

