

A PUBLICATION FOR TRAIL WORKERS

BRUCE TRAIL

TREADWAY

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UPDATES
EVENTS
IDEAS
NEWS

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Editor's Note

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE SO IMPORTANT THIS TIME OF YEAR

Everyone's asking, including my wife, when the work parties will start up again now that the holiday season is over. As we were taking our Christmas decorations down the other day, my wife was lamenting how sad it was to see everything come to an end especially when there isn't much to look forward to except another few months of winter. I said it's all a matter of attitude and suggested that she get an early start on spring house cleaning which could very well hasten the passing of winter and the arrival of spring. This was when she asked me when the work parties were going to start up again, "Soon, I hope" she said.

A CHANGE IN PHILOSOPHY

By Ross McLean

Initially when we built the Bruce Trail, our prime motivation was to clear a footpath for the hiking public. Now, almost fifty years later, there has been a significant change in emphasis with many of our clubs.

We learned a lot over the years from the Appalachian Trail experience, and they were the pioneers in this change of philosophy.

The Appalachian Mountain Club (one of the ATC's member clubs) wrote in its 1981 *Trail Building Guide*: "the historical function of the Club's [trail] crew was for years simply to clear brush and keep trail marked....Unprecedented numbers of visitors have taxed the physical ability of soils and plant life to remain healthy and stable under the pressure of great volumes of traffic. Aggravated erosion on slopes is rampant on many mountain trails."

This statement was low-keyed and just stated plain facts. But over the next two decades the AMC staff observed the increased impact of hiker use and natural erosion on the trails. Their third edition of their *Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance* presented a feeling of more urgency to involve conservation work in building and maintaining trails.

In the Introduction, under the title "Times Have Changed", it stated that "Today, the most compelling reason for trail work is to conserve the fragile soils on which our trails are built and protect them from the never-ending onslaught of boots and water. Trail work in the present is

not so much an exercise in clearing a path as it is an act of preserving our trails for the future.”

It continues: “This ...edition presents trail work as an act of hands-on conservation, one that is designed to preserve soils, water quality, and vegetation. The philosophy of the ...Trail Department is that trails are built and maintained to protect the environment, not to make passage through the woods easier (unless there is a safety issue involved.)”

Even if not specifically stated in print, the philosophy of Bruce Trail work has also moved in this direction. It was about seven years ago that the Philip and Jean Gosling Award was first presented. Named after one of our founders (and the current Honorary President), it was a recognition of environmental considerations in trail work. In the same vein, about five years ago the Bruce Trail changed its official name from an “Association” to a “Conservancy” (a change, by the way, that the Appalachian Trail had instituted itself just two years previously.) For most members perhaps, this change was not deemed to be significant, but the reality was that it was a major change in the emphasis on how we do things. For example, with land acquisition, no longer were we satisfied with a narrow hiking path; instead, the emphasis was now on a “conservation corridor.”



Photo by Richard Pomeroy

Several clubs of which I am aware have emphasized in their trail work this change in philosophy. Iroquoia, for example, can look with pride in their work in the Nassagaweya Canyon, most recently with their improvements to the Jack Leech-Porter Side Trail. This past fall the Caledon Hills Club did major rehabilitation work at the south end of the Hockley Valley Nature Reserve. Perhaps the most popular day hiking area in the club, its slopes which originated as glacial deposits had suffered badly from erosion.

The Bruce Trail Conservancy over the years has seen significant changes in its approach to trail building and maintenance. As we mature, the resulting quality of our work improves exponentially.

THE ONLY WAY TO LEARN TRAIL WORK

By Ross McLean

From the Introduction to the AMC's *Complete Guide to Trail Building and Maintenance*:

“A Guidebook cannot take the place of experience. Get in the field, learn firsthand, and give something back to the environment. You'll enjoy the experience and you'll have done your part to preserve our resources.”

The readers of *Treadway*, on the whole, are trail volunteers who have “done their part.” For that, everyone who values the Escarpment should thank you. But when talking to friends, invite them to come out and help.

The Bruce Trail is not primarily a hiking club; it is a Conservancy where our prime goal is to make a contribution to our greater community.

Your help is appreciated; now let's try to spread that message far and wide.

Note: The AMC is the Appalachian Mountain Club, one of the earliest trail clubs in North America.