

Credit River

The Caledon Hills Section of the Bruce Trail

# A Showcase for Side Trails

By Nicola Ross

The Caledon Hills Bruce Trail Club (CHBTC) is not so much an entity as it is a rich collection of poignant and sometimes humorous stories told by a cast of dedicated, hard-working characters. The script for the CHBTC is derived from 50 years of the Club's newsletter the *Caledon Comment* and is set against a backdrop that features some of the Niagara Escarpment's most loved landmarks including the Devil's Pulpit in the Forks of the Credit and the Cheltenham Badlands. It takes in the Hockley Valley's network of side trails and peaks over the border into the erratic re-appearance of the Niagara Escarpment in Mono Cliffs Provincial Park. The Club's trails offer perfect day-hikes for people throughout the Greater Toronto Area and can be completed end-to-end amid the glorious fall colours during the CHBTC's annual event on Thanksgiving Weekend.

The CHBTC maintains just over 100 kilometres of trail, with about 72 kilometres of main trail and 38 kilometres of side trails. The latter offer a unique glimpse into the Club's past. In fact, the CHBTC was the first of the Bruce Trail Conservancy's nine clubs to build a side trail. On October 20, 1968, 160 enthusiastic hikers showed up to christen the new route. They arrived in the Forks of the Credit in cars and two buses. The crowd split into five groups that were accompanied by an emergency vehicle – just in case. As the follow-up story in the Caledon Comment explains, "All went well; the rain held off, the colours were gorgeous, only four people needed a ride..."

Now known as the McLaren Side Trail, the Club's first side trail offers a second climb from the Credit River valley up the Niagara Escarpment that is less steep than the cable-assisted trail that scales the cliff face of the Devil's Pulpit. The route is also easier because there are no "Barry Westhouse giant steps": ones that were built by the Club's 6'4" trail builder without, as the Club's story goes, more diminutive hikers in mind. The McLaren Side Trail offers expansive views of the Caledon countryside where a handful of rural homes are awash in a blanket of maple, basswood and ash forest. The vista gives way to the heralded Devil's Pulpit Golf Course, while the trail passes through the valley, crossing the old Credit Valley Railway now home to the Credit Valley Explorer Tour Train that takes passengers over the high trestle bridge in the Forks of the Credit.

Nearby, the 440-metre-long Dorothy Medhurst Side Trail memorializes one of the CHBTC's 40-year volunteers. Medhurst was in BTC-founder Philip

Gosling's home when the CHBTC came to be some 50 years ago. Gosling recalls Medhurst's enthusiastic response when he proposed the trail cross her land at the end of Puckering Lane near the Forks of the Credit. He wrote in Caledon Comment, "I shall never forget her eagerness to help. What joy!!" Medhurst started the CHBTC's Tuesday hiking group, served on its board for many years, was a trail captain, looked after end-to-end check points, maintained trails and trimmed Christmas trees. Appropriately, given the boundless energy that exuded from Medhurst's wiry frame, her side trail offers hikers a steep climb from the Credit River, one of Ontario's premiere fly fishing streams, through a dense cedar forest, all within the Forks of the Credit Provincial Park.

Part of the same network of side trails, the Quarryman's Side Trail is a nod to those who worked in the quarries that carved out the Niagara Escarpment's cliffs in the late 1800s – their work changing forever the natural landscape. The reportedly rough and tumble workers lived in the aptly named village of Brimstone, heading out each day to extract enormous pink-tinted stones, many of which were used to build Queen's Park and other famous buildings in Toronto. The Trimble Side Trail gives a nod to long time Belfountain residents Roy and Eleanor Trimble. Roy, who together with his brother John, ran the local gas station for decades, helped the BTC's trail builders find their way through the converging valleys where the main and west branches of the Credit River meet to give the area its iconic name.

Further north, the CHBTC's section of trail rises as it skirts the enormous gravel



Lime Kiln Chimney

Photo: Gary Hall

operations that surround the village of Caledon. Dig deep enough through the aggregate and you will come upon the Niagara Escarpment hidden below. The landscape continues to tilt relentlessly upwards – or so it may feel to weary hikers. But the journey is worth it. Soon you arrive in the Hockley Valley, where the watershed runs north toward Georgian Bay rather than south toward the Great Lakes. It's as if you have crossed a Southern Ontario divide. But don't expect a flat downward slope, the Hockley Valley's ravines are deeper and more pronounced than those to the south. It's as if the landscape has been freed from a downward pressure exerted by all of those skyscrapers in the Greater Toronto Area. There are salmon in the north-flowing Nottawasaga River so large fishermen don't need to lie.

Within the 378-hectare Hockley Valley Provincial Nature Reserve is a vast network of side trails connecting with the main Bruce Trail. They are a delight for hikers who seek the convenience of a loop route. Again, their names tell a story. They recognize people: Cam Snell, Peter Beecham and the Griffiths; as well as natural and cultural elements of the landscape: Hemlock Ridge, Glacier Valley and Glen Cross. According to a story in Caledon Comment, however, only in the CHBTC's section is there a side trail named after a dog. A short 500 metres long, Darcy's Side Trail is appropriately sized since Darcy wasn't a very big dog.



Photo: Gary Hall

Credit Valley Explorer

A tenacious Jack Russell, it's likely that Darcy ruled Jim and Anne Wilson rather than the other way around. Regardless, he covered hundreds of miles on the Bruce Trail. When the footpath moved from the Wilson's property to its optimum route, the old entrance remained open as the Darcy Side Trail.

Also in the Hockley Valley is a pair of side trails named after the hard-working duo of Tom and Isabel East. The couple met on the Bruce Trail. Vivian East, Tom's daughter, wrote in the Caledon Comment, "It was the weekend of the AGM of the BTA, as we used to call it. It was the way they were dancing together at the party that night that made Anthea [Vivian's sister] and me look at each other quizzically to see such a sight." Together with the main Bruce Trail, the Tom East Side Trail and the Isabel East Side Trail combine to form the 8.4-kilometre-long Jeju Olle - Bruce Trail

Friendship Trail. Jeju Olle, according to the Bruce Trail Reference, "is a series of walking routes on Jeju Island, 130 km off the southwest coast of Korea." Subtropical, the island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, so its trails are fittingly twinned with the stunning footpaths within the Hockley Valley.

Another first for the CHBTC is the Laidlaw Side Trail. Opened in 2012, Dave Moule reported in Cal eNews that it was the first side trail "that spans the boundary between two different club sections." Moule explains, "It was a joint project of the Caledon Hills and Dufferin Hi-Land Clubs and is named after the Laidlaw family, one of the earliest pioneer families in the Mono Centre area."

So prolific are the CHBTC's side trails that the club introduced a new "Sideways" badge in 2014. To obtain it, you must complete 18 side trails in a series of five hikes. Having done so, you

will have gained a wonderful sense of the Club's trails. Moreover, you will have passed by its other famous landmark: the Cheltenham Badlands. Though the Badlands themselves are fenced off now, Olde Base Line Side Trail still passes near this provincially significant example of eroded Queenston Shale, which is yet another reminder that you are walking along the Niagara Escarpment – or what singer/songwriter Sarah Harmer describes as "the backbone of the land."•

*Nicola Ross released her latest book, Caledon Hikes: Loops & Lattes, in May 2015. An informative and beautiful guide, it offers hikers detailed information about 37 loop routes, all within the Caledon area (see page 34 or visit [brucetrail.org](http://brucetrail.org) for a copy). A hometown girl, Nicola was Caledon's Environmentalist of the year in 2004. Her articles have appeared in the Walrus, Globe & Mail, explore, Mountain Life and more. Visit [nicolaross.ca](http://nicolaross.ca) for more information.*



Hockley Valley

Photo: Brian Popseller