



Photos: Ron Savage

# Monster Work Party

By Ross McLean

*Last November, Ron Savage, Trail Director of the Sydenham Bruce Trail Club, was lamenting the enormous amount of work that would be necessary to bring all of the SBTC trails up to top standard.*

Sydenham has the longest stretch of main Trail of any of the nine BTC clubs and it has one of the smaller population bases. Indeed, there were sections which lacked a trail captain and where trail work had not been completed for some years.

It was decided to have a “monster work party” and to invite trail workers from across the Conservancy to spend a weekend in Sydenham. A notice was placed in the winter Bruce Trail Magazine, and the response was staggering. The initial goal was at least 40 volunteers; by mid-April we had a total of 70.

On the May 31st weekend, more than 90 volunteers worked on Sydenham trails. About one-third came from the local area but the others were drawn from six of the nine Bruce Trail Clubs. They included some of the most experienced Bruce Trail workers but also some “rookies” who were undertaking a new experience. About 15 crews each day tackled a specific section. Although not everything was completed, a real dint was made of

the list of Sydenham needs. For example, several reroutes were finished, two bridges were built, blazes were touched up, overgrowth was trimmed and a great deal of chainsawing was completed.

But it was not all work! For Saturday night we had arranged for dinner at a unique local restaurant. The 62 in attendance filled the place; even the Sydenham president who decided at the last minute to come could not get a seat! Then many of the group returned to the farm of a Sydenham past-president. Twenty-two tents were set up on his land, and around the evening campfire, all the problems of the BTC were solved! (Of course, by the next morning, we had forgotten those answers.)

Credit must go to some of the Sydenham volunteers who used their unique connections to arrange such stellar weather!

By the end of the weekend, people were already talking about a repetition of the weekend project in 2015. Watch for notices in future BTC publications.



I remember my first experiences with trail work more than 40 years ago. Bruce Trail work parties at that time were embarrassingly poorly attended. One summer I was hiking the White Mountains in New England and met a work crew returning at the end of the day. Their enthusiasm was so apparent. I approached the leader and asked him the secret of his success. I still remember his answer: “They have to have fun!”

On the Sydenham monster work party, a lot of people had a lot of fun. At the dinner, for example, the room bubbled over with the voices of excitement at their achievements. One volunteer bragged that he had built a bridge! He declared jokingly that he had begun the day as a novice and ended it as an engineer! Everyone was sharing in the satisfaction of helping to accomplish so much.

One of the secrets of the Bruce Trail success since its origin has been the outpouring of volunteer energy and enthusiasm in making the dream a reality. The 2014 Sydenham monster work party is another example of this dynamic force in action. •