

SPRING 2026



Exploring Strategy on the Trail - See story & photos, Pages 3 & 4  
Photo by Robin Garrett

## *President's Message*

**Ellen Savoia**

*Welcome to our first newsletter of 2026!*

What a wonderfully wintery start to the year we are having. Winter is an amazing time to be out on the trail. The colours are just as beautiful: soft greys of the bare branches, dark green of coniferous trees, beige and brown of dried grasses, deep purple shadows in the snow. When you head out be sure to bring extra layers, take your poles and icers, and don't forget to stay hydrated.

Looking forward to spring, save the date for our Annual General Meeting, Saturday May 2nd. We are planning a pancake breakfast and morning meeting at Hoxie Hall, Camp Cave Springs in Beamsville. We will have lots of fun, great food and some hiking too. Hope to see you there. ◀

## 2025-2026 NBTC Board of Directors

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[niagarabruceclub.com](http://niagarabruceclub.com)

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# MERRITTHON

## 45KM

November 7, 2026, 7 a.m.

Are you ready to  
challenge yourself by  
taking a hike or run along  
the first Welland Canal?

Beginning in Port Colborne and ending in Port  
Dalhousie, the historic 45 km route is  
waiting for you.

Everyone who completes the route and goes through  
all checkpoints will earn the limited edition 200th  
anniversary Merritthon badge.

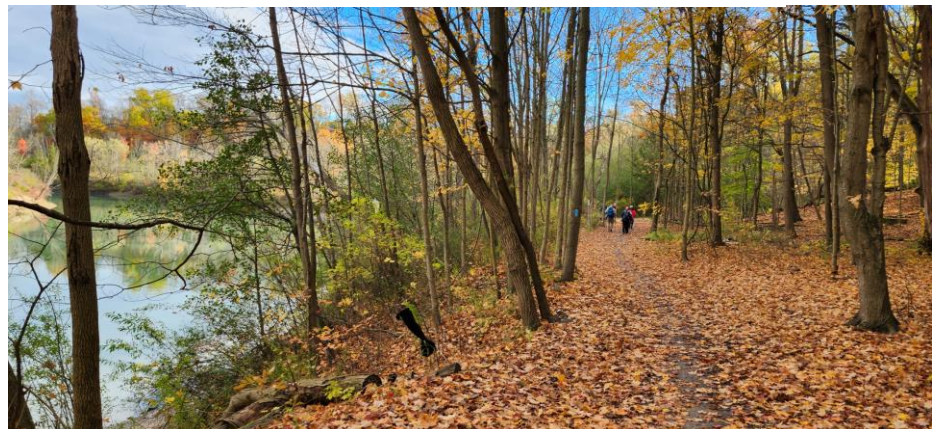
\$50 registration fee (\$60 for non-members) includes  
bus transportation to start of hike, checkpoint  
snacks and water, badge, and helps to support the  
BTC in its mission to preserve a ribbon of wilderness  
for everyone, forever.

For more information and to register:

[hikes.bruceclub.org](http://hikes.bruceclub.org)



Twelve-Mile Creek. Photo: Karen Couch



# Exploring Strategy on the Trail

Submitted by Robin Garrett  
BTC Board Director

As a Board member of the Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC), I'm deeply involved in the organization's strategy, governance, and financial oversight. Recently, I had the pleasure of serving as a guest lecturer for fourth-year Bachelor of Business Administration (Hospitality) students at Niagara College. And what better way to teach about the Bruce Trail than by heading out on a hike?

I took the students in the Attractions Planning & Management class onto the Bruce Trail, which runs just behind Niagara College's beautiful Niagara-on-the-Lake campus. Learning in nature provided the perfect backdrop for exploring how strategy, stewardship, and visitor experience come together on the trail.



During the hike, we discussed several key topics, including:

- **The history and vision of the Bruce Trail** — one of Ontario's largest land trusts and the steward of Canada's oldest and longest marked footpath. The trail spans 1,395 kilometres of maintained trail and provides free, environmentally responsible public access to nature.
- **The Conservancy's strategy and impact**, drawing on insights from BTC's recently released Annual Impact Report, I highlighted the "thru-strategy" as an example of a strategic priority focused on enhancing the Bruce Trail experience.
- **Board governance and education**, including a look at a typical Board agenda: the CEO's Report and updates from the four Board Committees (Finance & Risk, Land Securement,

Governance, and Human Resources). We also explored educational topics such as the economic impact of the trail and new research using anonymized cell phone data, which shows that approximately **1.4 million hours were spent in nature on the Bruce Trail over the past year.**

- **Ways to get involved and support** this vital conservation organization.

The students asked thoughtful questions and were particularly inspired by BTC's mission: *to preserve a ribbon of wilderness for everyone, forever.* There were some avid hikers in the class, including one student who has already completed an End-to-End hike! His enthusiasm was contagious and may have inspired a few classmates to lace up their boots and hit the trail.

With many international students in the group, we also enjoyed discussing BTC's Friendship Trails with partner organizations around the world — a reminder that the Bruce Trail is part of a much larger global conservation community. ◀

# Exploring Strategy on the Trail

Photos by Robin Garrett



# NBTC DEIB Committee

Submitted by the DEIB Committee

The Niagara Bruce Trail Club's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) Committee is looking forward to continuing to engage with members in 2026. Thank you to those who participated in our hike leader survey in 2025 and who attended our open committee meetings. The DEIB Committee presented the survey results and recommendations to the Board, which was well received. The BTC undertook a membership survey in 2025, and shared Niagara-based results. Common themes that came out of both surveys were used to develop concrete actions that the Board has started tackling. The DEIB Committee has used these actions to set goals for 2026:

- Support the Board in documenting issues and providing constructive input to the BTC regarding hike schedule technology, and hike pace and terrain descriptions. The Niagara Club, with the most scheduled hikes of any club in the BTC network, has the best chance of collecting specific examples to support the BTC in making improvements for everyone.
- Support the Hike Director in setting up a discussion forum for hike leaders to facilitate communication, exchange of information and planning.
- Assist in developing an outreach / partnership strategy targeting other community groups with aims to connect diverse communities and individuals to the Bruce Trail and the Niagara Bruce Trail Club.
- Support the Hike Director and Hike Leaders with information and community connections for diverse hikes.
- Support the Board by reviewing the hike calendar offerings periodically and offering suggestions on where there are gaps in programming.

In working toward these goals, we will continue to engage with members and communicate our progress through The Grapevine newsletter and at in-person events.

Increasing access to the trail requires everyone's input and support. We invite you to join us to learn more or contribute ideas. We will hold **open meetings** two to three times per year that anyone may attend. The purpose of those meetings is to engage with interested volunteers, solicit feedback, and listen to new ideas. **The first open meeting of 2026 will be Sunday, March 29**, with the DEIB Committee Hike before the meeting. Location: Cave Springs Conservation Area. Geology Hike at 1:00pm followed by the DEIB open meeting at Cave Springs Winery at 3:00pm. Details on the hike schedule soon. Interested in participating? Contact Angela at: [nbtc4membership@gmail.com](mailto:nbtc4membership@gmail.com) ◀

DEIB Committee members:  
Kristin Hanson, Angela Lytle, Dian Wright, Jeanne Lewis

*Fostering inclusion and belonging through community partnerships:*

## *Rainbow-Welcome Hikes on the Niagara Bruce Trail*

Submitted by Angela Lytle  
Photos by Angela Lytle

Once a month since our inaugural Rainbow Hike on Bruce Trail Day 2025, we have been collaborating with Bridges Niagara Immigrant and Refugee Services and PFLAG Niagara to offer a "Rainbow-Welcome" guided group hike on the Niagara Bruce Trail. Partnering with these community organizations has allowed us to reach new hikers in order to help fulfill the vision and promise of the "Bruce Trail for All."

The goal of the **Rainbow-Welcome Hikes** is to build on work that was already being done by Bridges and PFLAG Niagara to create intentional and inclusive spaces where 2S-LGBTQIA+ newcomers / immigrants can be in community with other 2S-LGBTQIA+ folks and allies, as well as other newcomers / immigrants who do not identify as 2S-LGBTQIA+ to foster relationships, enjoy recreational activities and learn about nature and experience outdoor activities.

*Continued Pages 6 and 7*

***Fostering inclusion and belonging through community partnerships: Rainbow-Welcome Hikes on the Niagara Bruce Trail***

From Page 5



**Above: NBTC Bruce Trail Day 2025**

**Below: Rainbow-Welcome Hike, Cave Springs, November 2025**



Partnering with Bridges Niagara and PFLAG Niagara signals that the NBTC is committed to offering Rainbow Hikes that are intentionally inclusive and welcoming, where 2S-LGBTQIA+ folks can relax and be themselves and enjoy the company of others while connecting to the land and nature around us. It is a joyful environment that brings people together across many diversities, giving us opportunities for learning, connection, laughter, and sharing great snacks, too. Hikes are led by NBTC hike leaders along with Simon Calaycay from Bridges Niagara and Kim Ansell from PFLAG.

If you don't already know about the work these amazing organizations do to support newcomers to Canada and to support 2S&LGBTQIA+ folks, family, and friends in the region, please do check out their websites and activities at the links below.

Bridges Niagara also has a lending library of hiking gear to assist new hikers in getting out on the trails. Many thanks to all the NBTC members who contributed to the donation drive last December to support Bridges' library - you can be assured that the donations are being put to good use, especially to help folks gear up for hiking in winter for the first time!

The next Rainbow-Welcome Hike is scheduled for March 14th, and generally hikes happen on the second Saturday of the month. We hope to plan some additional activities with social and cultural components throughout the year. If you are interested in supporting a Rainbow-Welcome Hike (for example, by carpooling with folks who don't have cars to get to more remote hiking locations or donating your old hiking poles to the Bridges lending library) please reach out to the club.

- Learn more about the work of PFLAG Niagara supporting 2S-LGBTQIA+ folks, families, and friends in the region here: <https://pflagniagara.ca/>
- Learn more about the work Bridges Niagara does supporting immigrants and refugees in the region here: <https://bridgesniagara.ca/>



Simon Calaycay, 2S-LGBTQIA+ Connections Coordinator, Bridges Niagara Immigrant and Refugee Services - they ALWAYS bring hot drinks and snacks, too!

More Photos Page 7

***Fostering inclusion and belonging through community partnerships:  
Rainbow-Welcome Hikes on the Niagara Bruce Trail***

Rainbow-Welcome Hike, Cave Springs Loop  
January 17, 2026



Rainbow-Welcome Hike, Louth Conservation Area,  
February 14, 2026



"Best Snowman Ever!"  
January 17, 2026

The "My First Hike Badge" is awarded on your very first hike on the Bruce Trail.

**Sign up here:**

[https://hikes.brucetrail.org/ecwd\\_calendar/niagara/](https://hikes.brucetrail.org/ecwd_calendar/niagara/)



Above: Hydro Hill  
Below: Shorthills Provincial  
Park  
Photos: Karen Couch



## *The Uniqueness of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club*

Lynskie (Lynne) Mitchell  
NBTC Marketing Director

What sets Niagara Bruce Trail Club apart from the other eight clubs? Is it our “F2F” (Fort to Fort) Hike that happens annually in April? Seriously, who doesn't want to see if they can hike 27 kms, two days in a row (yup, that's 54kms!)? Imagine starting in Niagara-on-the-Lake at Fort George on the Niagara River on Day One. And then starting at Fort Erie on Lake Erie the next day. If you are scratching your head wondering how that is possible ... let me explain. You park at Kingsbridge Park (Niagara Falls) each day and board a bus that takes you to the starting point. Along your hike, you'll see checkpoints staffed with club volunteers who will provide you with refreshments. That alone makes me want to register!



Maybe the **May E2E** (End to End) where you will hike the entire length of the Niagara Bruce Trail over three days is something that appeals to you. Your journey will begin in Grimsby, at the western end of the Niagara Bruce Trail and finish at the Queenston Cairn, the southernmost endpoint of the Bruce Trail. Along the way, you will experience spectacular escarpment views while hiking through scenic wineries, close to cascading waterfalls, near vibrant orchards and Niagara's beautiful and iconic landscapes. Your daily hike will cover about 27kms, and, like all our event hikes, there will be checkpoints along the way where you can have a snack, a drink, a chat with a fellow hiker, and a rest. This fun event is self-led, so you go at your own pace. And, at the end of the three days, there's a fabulous badge waiting for you.



*Worry not if a multi day event is not what appeals to you ... we've got you covered.*

In June, we have the one-day **Laura Secord** event hike where you will hike along the Bruce Trail from Laura Secord's Homestead in Queenston to Decew House in Thorold. Hikers will be transported by bus from the check-in at the Niagara Region office to the start of the hike in Queenston. Everyone will hike at their own pace to the final checkpoint. Remember the snacks I mentioned earlier ... well, we won't disappoint you on this hike either. There will be checkpoints and snacks! Once you complete Laura's hike, you will get to meet her, and be presented with a badge.



*And we don't leave you stranded at Decew House - there will be volunteer drivers available to drive you back to your car.*

*Continued Page 9*

## The Uniqueness of the Niagara Bruce Trail Club

From Page 8

This hike is approximately 32kms long and has a combination of beautiful trails and some road work where you can recharge before getting back into the trails.

*Still haven't found the perfect hike?*

Look no further than **The Merritthon**. This 45kms, one-day hike along the Welland Canal Parkway might just be the one you have been training for!



This self-guided hike, along a mainly paved trail, will be a challenge. But don't let that stop you - it always sells out. Eighty+ hikers rise to this challenge ... will you be one of them? Oh, and did I mention the checkpoints and snacks along the way? Come celebrate the history of the Welland Canal as you hike, run, jog and/or walk from Port Colborne to Port Dalhousie. Upon arrival in Port Dalhousie, you will be presented with the coveted badge.

Yup, I think these hikes and the camaraderie that you experience on all our hikes, makes us unique and special. And, okay, yes ... the other eight clubs are pretty special too. *But I'm partial to the Niagara Bruce Trail Club.* ◀

## Niagara Bruce Trail Club - 2026 Event Hikes



**Fort-to-Fort (54km)**  
**April 18 & 19**

- Hike the entire length of the Niagara Parkway, from Fort George to Fort Erie, over 2 days.
- Enjoy approximately 27km each day of beautiful river scenery.
- Small hills involved but mostly paved paths with some road walking.

Registration is \$70 (\$60 for one day), Non-Members \$80 (\$70 for one day).  
Fee includes bus, checkpoints and badge.



**Niagara End-to-End**  
**May 16 to 18**

- Cover this historic 80km section of the Bruce Trail over three days enjoying panoramic views of vineyards, orchards, and Lake Ontario.
- Rocky sections, heavily wooded areas and remnants of historic settlements - the Niagara Section has it all.

Registration is \$80 for the entire weekend (\$40 for 1 day). Non-Members \$90 and \$50. Fees include bus, checkpoints, light lunch on the final day and badge. You must complete all 3 days in order to earn this badge.



**Laura Secord (30km)**  
**June 13**

- Enjoy a part of our Canadian heritage by hiking along the Bruce Trail from Laura Secord's Homestead in Queenston to DeCew House in Thorold.
- We are sure this 32km hike was a challenge for Laura in a long dress and no Nikes but we never heard any complaints.
- Follow her lead and rise to the challenge.

Registration is \$60 for members, \$70 for non-members.  
Fee includes bus, checkpoints, light lunch and badge.



**Merritthon (45km)**  
**November 7**

- William Hamilton Merritt was the creator of the Welland Canal and the Merritthon is a trek of approximately 45 km along the first historical canal route.
- The hike begins in Port Colborne, follows the Welland Canal and moves onto the Merritt Trail in St. Catharines to finish in Port Dalhousie.
- You can expect to keep pace with giant laker ships, see industrial remnants, murals and enjoy woods and streets along the way.

Registration is \$50 for members, \$60 for non-members.  
Fee includes bus, snacks, water checkpoints and badge.

Register online at [hikes.brucetrail.org](https://hikes.brucetrail.org)

Lake Moodie. Photo by Karen Couch



## NBTC 2025 Volunteer Appreciation – Mangia & Mille Grazie

Submitted by Janet Davey

On November 30th, the Niagara Bruce Trail Club held its second annual Volunteer Appreciation event at Lock 3 Museum in St. Catharines.

This event celebrates and honours our dedicated volunteers. The Bruce Trail relies on the passion and commitment of its volunteers to thrive. From monitoring and maintaining the trail, to leading hikes, building strong relationships with landowners, and fostering a welcoming, connected community, volunteers are truly the heart of the NBTC. Their time, energy, and enthusiasm ensure that the trail remains safe, accessible, and enjoyable for everyone who uses it.

A delicious meal of Italian food was served, followed by a presentation from guest speaker Adrian Petry. Adrian is the Visitor Services Coordinator at the St. Catharines Museum and gave an excellent talk on the history of the Welland Canal. Photographer Brad Wood was also on hand to present a collection of his beautiful photographs.

We were also able to honour three individuals who went above and beyond for the club. The club has moved the Volunteer Award presentations from the Annual General Meeting to the Volunteer Appreciation Event. Read more about the winners on Page 13. ◀



Above:

Fun centrepieces highlight the Italian theme.

Below:

Sure to bring a smile: crowd-pleasing Bruce Trail themed treats.



Sam Rutherford, NBTC Landowners Relations Director, and Janet Davey, NBTC Past President, at the welcome table.

# NBTC Volunteer Appreciation Event November 30, 2025

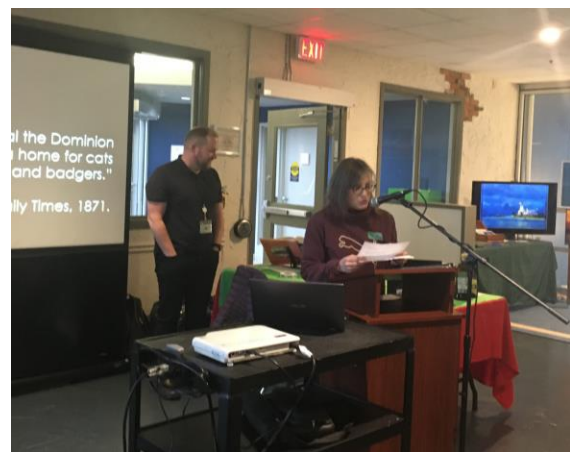
Photos by Kathleen Orth



David Kelly, NBTC Land Acquisition Director, in conversation with Lynskie Mitchell, NBTC Media Relations Director. Some items on the table: NBTC Event Badge Tube Scarf, the Deca Scarf, and the Take a Hike bumper sticker (4" x 8"). *NBTC merchandise is available at our event hikes, social events, and our AGM.*



The red-checkered tablecloth brightens the room and draws attention to the various delicious Italian dishes.



NBTC President Ellen Savoia introduces the guest speaker, Adrian Petry, Visitor Services Coordinator at the St. Catharines Museum & Welland Centre.



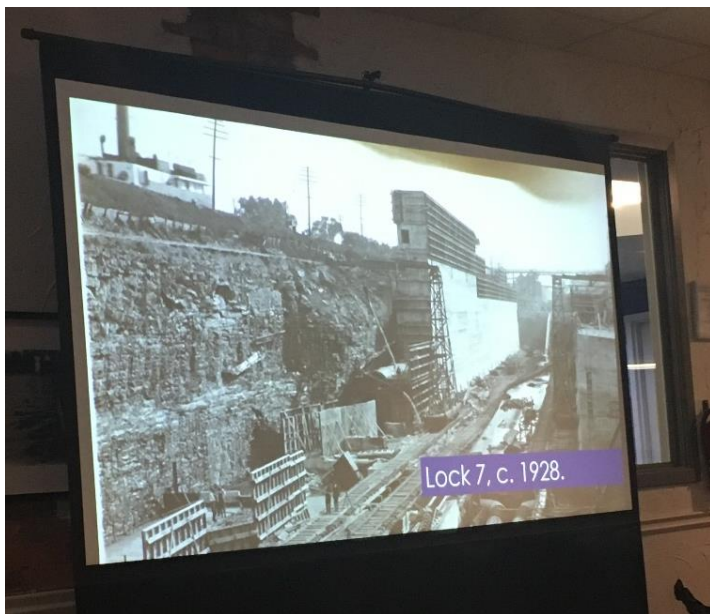
NBTC President Ellen Savoia and Vice-President Kristin Hanson share duties at the bar.



Guest presenter Brad Wood, Brad Wood Photography. See more: <https://brad-wood-photography.square.site/>

# Volunteer Appreciation Event November 30, 2025

Photos by Kathleen Orth



## NBTC's Welland Canals Badge

Here's your chance to learn all about the Welland Canal! To earn the **Welland Canals Badge**, hikers must complete a series of four hikes and take the required photos.

Each hike is on a separate document and has a **Plotaroute** map on it. Some of the hikes are on the Bruce Trail, some are not. These hikes may be completed independently or with an organized group. ◀



**Above:** Rick Waters with Ellen Savoia and Janet Davey.

**Centre:** Joanne Krupa with Ellen Savoia and Marion Hanover

**Below:** Karen Couch with Ellen Savoia, Alan Laver and Lauren Doig

To read about the 2025 Award Winners, see <https://niagara.brucetrail.org/volunteer-awards/>

# NBTC Volunteer Awards

## 2025 Award Winners

Since 1963 volunteers have been the driving force behind the Bruce Trail. Today, more than 1,500 volunteers support the work of the Bruce Trail Conservancy, serving as caretakers of the Bruce Trail. NBTC is proud to offer three Awards to recognize volunteer contributions.

### Nomination Criteria

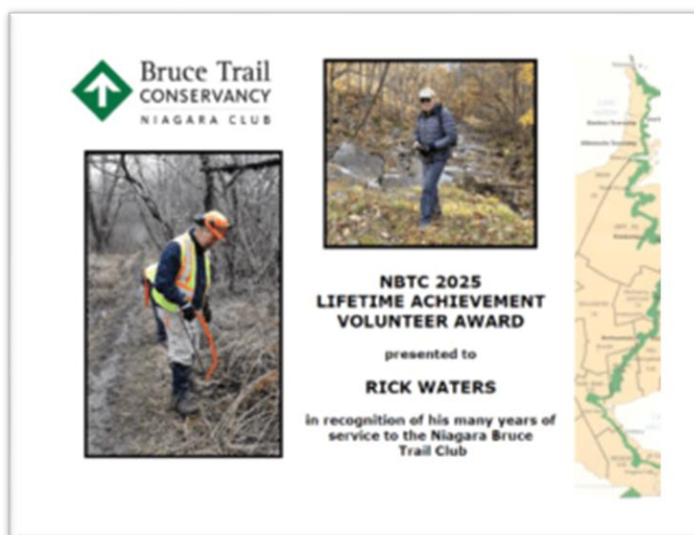
- **NBTC Lifetime Achievement Award**  
Awarded annually to a member(s) who has made a significant volunteer contribution to the organization at the club level over many years.
- **NBTC Volunteer of the Year Award**  
Awarded annually to a member or committee whose volunteerism has gone above and beyond in the year just completed.
- **NBTC Unsung Hero Award**  
Awarded annually to a member(s) who can always be counted on to lend a hand and volunteer at the club level over many years. Current board members not eligible.

*“I was deeply honoured to receive this recognition, especially knowing the significant efforts and contributions made by so many others within the club. The strength of the NBTC lies in its volunteers, and this celebration was a wonderful reminder of the incredible people who make our community what it is.”*

– Joanne Krupa, NBTC Social Events Director



Photo by Margaret Northfield





## NBTC's Unsung Hero 2025

*I am honored to be recognized as this year's **Unsung Hero**. To me, being a Niagara Bruce Trail Conservancy member is not just about the hiking, but about the people we meet and the stories we share along the way.*

During the hikes I lead, my favourite moments are the “aha” moments to be remembered. Sometimes it is a new hiker’s “I DID it” or “I’ve found my peeps.” Other times, it comes when hikers connect with the heritage of our land as well as with nature. I’ve enjoyed learning and sharing many stories, in particular Chloe Cooley’s and Teyoninhokarawen’s. The realization we are walking the same paths used by those who shaped our local and nation-shifting history is inspiring.

Similarly, my role on the Badge Committee has brought me great joy. Seeing our members “wear” their hard-earned stories on their packs. Every new badge represents a BTC member pushing their limits, from winter fitness to navigating the History of the Welland Canal or learning about NOTL’s Black History. It’s wonderful knowing that each badge helps light a passion for stewardship and adventure. General Brock would be proud that BTC members celebrate his legacy, while helping to preserve a ribbon of wilderness for everyone, forever.

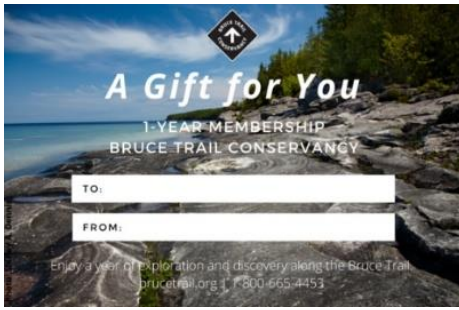
I want to say “thank you” again for this award, especially to my nominees, Lauren Doig and Alan Laver; they have inspired me in so many ways. With their support and friendship (along with many others), and in my various volunteering roles, I have gained a better sense of the many individual efforts that have led to our collective success. I look forward to celebrating many more skill-building milestones and, of course, stories, with you on the trails to come. ◀

*Sincerely, Karen Couch*



Photos by Karen Couch





## A GIFT OF MEMBERSHIP

A Gift Membership is a great way to introduce a friend or family member to the Bruce Trail and the wonders of the Niagara Escarpment.

Your gift recipient will receive: a welcome package, a Membership Gift Card by email (personalized by you), which the recipient can redeem online or by phone and choose their membership preferences, all the benefits of BTC membership, and any products you purchase in the same order as part of the gift membership.

You will receive a charitable donation tax receipt for the full amount of the gift membership.

To order a gift membership, see <https://brucetrail.org/become-a-member/> ◀

CAVE SPRINGS PROVINCIAL PARK  
PHOTO BY KAREN COUCH



Use code **NIAGARABT** and for each tour booked by your club for 2025, we will donate \$25 to the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

# Take the path less travelled.

*Crosslands National Park, Saskatchewan  
Courtesy: Benjamin Hutton Photography*

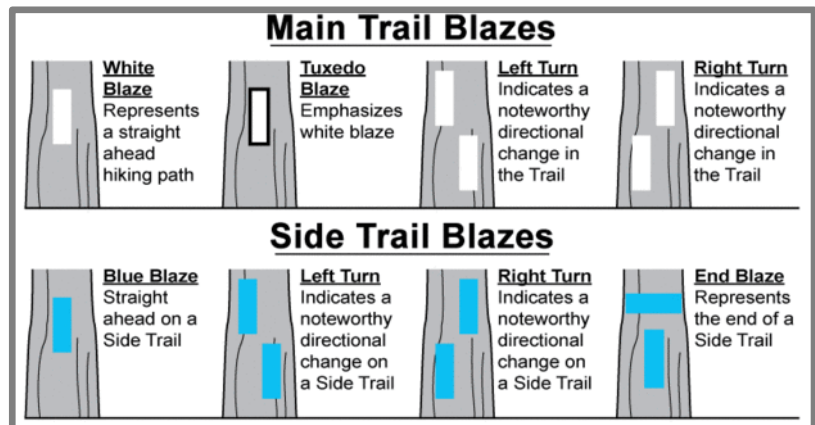
<b>Gaspé Hiking</b>	<u>DOUBLE</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
8 Days: June 8, 2025	\$4,995	\$5,895
<b>NEW: Hike Saskatchewan</b>	<u>DOUBLE</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
10 Days: June 20, 2025	\$5,295	\$6,395
<b>P.E.I. Hiking</b>	<u>DOUBLE</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
8 Days: July 15, 2025	\$4,795	\$5,695
<b>Newfoundland Coast-to-Coast</b>	<u>DOUBLE</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
10 Days: July 25, 2025	\$7,595	\$8,595
<b>Banff Hiking</b>	<u>DOUBLE</u>	<u>SINGLE</u>
8 Days: August 8, 2025	\$6,895	\$7,495

**PRICE INCLUDES:** Roundtrip airfare from Toronto, Connections Program, coach transportation, accommodation, meals and highlights as listed on website, all entry fees and passes, local guides and Tour Director. Prices are in Canadian dollars, are per person and include HST.

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**The Grapevine** is the newsletter of the Niagara Bruce Club, one of the nine member clubs of the Bruce Trail Conservancy.

**The Grapevine** appears four times a year.

NBTC Members are invited to submit stories and photos.

Copy due date for the Summer 2026 issue is April 30<sup>th</sup>.

For editorial guides and for rates to advertise, contact [btcgrapevine@gmail.com](mailto:btcgrapevine@gmail.com)

**BRUCE TRAIL CONSERVANCY MISSION**  
*Preserving a ribbon of wilderness, for everyone, forever.*