

Community Pitches In to Clean Up the Trans Canada Trail

By CATE WALLIS

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Taking a break in the clean up: (from left) Dorothy Maluk, Olive Kowalchuk, Anthony Kowalchuk, Rose Rogasky, Hazel Michalchuk pause during last Saturday's Clean Up Bee on the Trans Canada Trail near Sandy Lake

[photo by Doreen Stapleton]

"When we first moved here nearly five years ago, I was looking for places to walk," said Sandy Lake resident Cathy Wroblewski. "One day I came across this little tiny sign indicating the Trans Canada Trail (TCT). I was so offended by the garbage on the trail that I couldn't walk on it. When the snow melted you could see the mess everywhere. That first year, my husband Rob and I took our trailer out there and loaded it full of garbage and hauled it away."

Since that day, Cathy has become interested in keeping the trail clean, especially the section that she loves most, the one-mile stretch around Beauford Lake. Last spring, a trail clean up was organized and community members hauled all kinds of trash from the trail. This year, the exercise was repeated once again, and 17 volunteers participated.

Doreen Stapleton is Vice-President of the Rosburn Subdivision Trail Association (RSTA) that oversees the maintenance of this section of the TCT. She is also a councillor in the Rural Municipality (R.M.) of Harrison.

"Last year was the first time the trail had been cleaned for as long as anyone could remember so we had everything from old spikes, to suitcases full of clothing, to abandoned fridges and water heaters!" said Stapleton. "However, this year proved encouraging as the refuse was mostly garbage discarded from careless users (chip bags, drink cans, cups, bottles, etc.) We're hoping each year will get easier to clean & therefore more of an area can be added to the clean-up day."

The TCT system was built on abandoned rail beds and reaches into all parts of Canada. In Manitoba the first significant length of trail to be registered was the Rosburn Subdivision Trail stretching from Neepawa to Russell. That was in 1998. Since that time, the government of Manitoba, partnering with local community groups RSTA, has committed

more than \$3.5million dollars to developing this trail system in the province.

"Anything to do with tourism has a strong impact on our municipality and the environmental and recreational attraction of the TCT has great appeal for our residents and visitors," explained Stapleton. "The number of trail users might be small here in comparison to other areas on the TCT, but the enthusiasm and dedication to its growth shows tremendous promise for the future. The area especially the one-mile stretch around Beauford Lake has become quite famous for its beauty and wildlife."

Stapleton thinks that education is the key to solving the litter problem on the trail. "I really think it's just a matter of time and more exposure to all the benefits the trail has to offer to our community. So often we do not appreciate the blessings we have in our own backyard, and this is literally one of those times. I guarantee if you cleaned it once, you'd never litter it again!"

In order to showcase the trail and to commemorate International Trails Day, a "Walk and Talk" hike is planned for Saturday, June 7. Leaving from the Rails to Trails Kiosk in Sandy Lake at 3 p.m., the guided tour will travel west on the TCT past Beauford Lake. Special guests will share anecdotes of the trail and local history.

Following last Saturday's clean up, the RSTA hosted a meat draw at the Sandy Lake Hotel that raised \$283. Also this year, the RSTA applied for and received a grant from Manitoba Recreational Trails Association (MRTA) which will be used this summer to groom the trail going seven miles west from the junction of highways 45 and 10. The plan is to smooth the trail to make it suitable for bicycle use. This is a pilot project to test this particular grooming method, and to see if there is a positive impact on trail usage.

The last word goes to Cathy Wroblewski. She was so moved by her love for this special place that she got permission to put two signs up on the trail. One says, "Respect this trail. Respect yourself." The other says, "Blessed are they who respect this trail."

"We are trying to get the message out that you should not leave your garbage behind. If I caught someone, it's a very good question what would I say. How do you appeal to someone who doesn't care? I truly love this trail. I feel ownership of it. It belongs to all of us, individually and collectively. It's my church. It makes me sad that the most beautiful mile seems to get the most garbage."