

Bruce Trails Conservancy launches Passport to Nature program

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The Bruce Trail Conservancy (BTC) has launched a new initiative, Passport to Nature, designed to make Canada's oldest and longest marked footpath more accessible to people of all ages and experience levels.

Manager of Community Engagement Laura Tuohy said the program, based on similar programs created by fellow conservation groups and parks, will offer a curated series of free or low-cost events throughout the year.

“The Passport to Nature is a brand new program for the Bruce Trail Conservancy and its nine Bruce Trail clubs,” she said. “The goal is to offer a series of free or low-cost events throughout the year, intended to encourage people to spend time in nature and to learn a little bit more about the Bruce Trail and the Bruce Trail Conservancy and the Niagara Escarpment that they’re exploring.”

Passport to Nature was developed in response to a common barrier the Bruce Trail Conservancy encountered: the sheer scale of the Bruce Trail.

Organizers recognized that many potential visitors did not know where to start or what the trail had to offer beyond long-distance hiking.

“To someone who's new to the Bruce Trail, the size and scope of it can seem kind of overwhelming, and people don't necessarily know where to start,” Tuohy said. “Sometimes it's hard to point people in the right direction because there's so much going on. It's a 900-kilometre trail, going along the entire Niagara Escarpment, and it might seem like you need to be a hiker who really enjoys a challenge or an end-to-end or those sorts of things to really enjoy the Bruce Trail, but you don't.”

By assembling a list of guided hikes, educational outings, and conservation activities, the program aims to provide clear entry points and help people discover experiences that suit their interests, schedules, and comfort levels.

Participants can pick up a printed passport booklet and collect stickers as they attend events, adding an element of fun and accomplishment that mirrors the Bruce Trail Conservancy's longstanding culture of badges and milestones.

Events range from local outings in sections such as Caledon Hills, Dufferin Highlands and a full moon hike at Boyne Valley Provincial Park. An opportunity slightly farther afield includes a geology-and-history walk at Rock Hill Corner, one of the Bruce Trail Conservancy's protected nature reserves.

Some activities also focus directly on stewardship, such as habitat restoration days that tackle invasive species like common buckthorn.

“Some of our events here are opportunities for people to get their hands dirty and get really involved in conservation work,” Tuohy said. “One of the things we do on many of our protected areas is pulling buckthorn, and it's a heck of a lot of fun. It's an opportunity to learn and get involved.”

At its core, Passport to Nature supports the Bruce Trail Conservancy's mission as both a trail organization and a land trust.

By connecting people with the escarpment's forests, geology, and communities, the program seeks to build the personal ties that underpin long-term conservation.

?The Bruce Trail Conservancy is not only a trail organization, but we're a land trust,? Tuohy said. ?We fundraised to purchase land along the Niagara Escarpment for conservation, and that means that we are conserving the ecosystems of the Niagara Escarpment and also creating a permanent home for the Bruce Trail.?

?We realized throughout our history that connecting people with nature is an important part of inspiring long-term conservation. When people feel connected to it, or when they have experiences in it, they're more likely to want to do something to protect it. Many of the events take place, at least in part, on Bruce Trail Conservancy protected land, and that was really important.?

It is the hope of the Bruce Trail Conservancy and its local clubs that Passport to Nature serves as a crucial hub and gateway for locals and visitors to learn more about the Bruce Trail. The program also helps them find interesting activities in the region and learn how to protect the land for years to come.

A physical passport is already available, and new events will be added to the web portal as they become available.

For more information, visit: brucetrail.org/passport-to-nature