



### National Hiking Trail

#### Hike Canada En Marche (HCEM)

Hike Canada en Marche acknowledges, recognizes, and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of the land we call Canada and their enduring relationship with the (Traditional Territories) land through which hiking trails pass.

HCEM is a registered non-profit with directors from all over Canada.

#### Vision

To promote hiking networks throughout Canada with emphasis on maintained long-distance trails.

#### Mission

To promote, by working with local groups, the development and use of a Canada-wide network of hiking trails from coast to coast to coast that offer both Canadians and visitors the natural beauty and cultural heritage of Canada’s diverse regions, as well as facilitating a form of exercise that is physically and mentally beneficial.

#### Strategy

To assist hikers in finding hiking trails and helping plan their hiking activities in all areas of Canada by means of a website and other media.

To work with all levels of government and trail organizations to achieve our objectives of active transportation, tourism, healthy exercise, improved mental health, and connection with the natural environment. This includes promoting hiking networks in all regions of Canada and assisting local trail organizations to raise funds for trail construction and maintenance.

To encourage responsible use of hiking trails that are consistent with the values of Hike Canada en Marche.

#### History: National Hiking Trail

From a 1971 meeting of national outdoor organizations and with the slogan “Towards a Foot Trail across Canada”, the National Hiking Trail was launched officially at a ceremony in Ottawa in 1987. Piece by piece, the scenic footpath grew between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, and our long-held vision of a natural

corridor connecting existing natural-surface pedestrian trail systems with parklands and wild places was becoming a reality.

The Bruce Trail of Ontario, the forerunner of Canada’s modern-day trail system, was the pioneer. Completed in the Centennial Year 1967, its aim was to save the Niagara Escarpment and its unique natural features from the threat of development by establishing 900 kilometres of trail along its length. It started with the remarkable relationship grounded on handshake access permission between land managers and the trail organization, enabling public use of the trail. In 2025, the Bruce Trail is 1379 km long.

#### HCEM, NHT and making the map

Since the early days, HCEM has been working to connect a footpath. Parts of Canada such as BC and the Rocky Mountains were blessed with trail opportunities. Other parts of Canada ranged from difficult to virtually impossible.

So last year, a special trail committee set out to make a map, to see next steps for HCEM.

As the map grew from an 11”x17” page for Canada, to being spread out over provincial/territorial pages, it showed significant potential — hikers, especially international hikers, would be thrilled. But more than that it could connect trail organizations, share their realities, histories and best practices, build volunteerism, help lobby for maintenance, help with large natural catastrophes, build regional economies, and create a hiking community network.

The map reflects transitioning from identifying a simple footpath across Canada, to designating a single backbone trail with signature trails along the way, to today’s map with its smattering of trails scattered across a vast land mass.

Our goal became to make not so much an actual hiking map as a pictorial finding aid, roughly showing the trails using gps data. The companion part was looking for both trail owners, trail maintainers, as well as hiking groups.

Today, HCEM is evolving to an information coordination organization whose purpose is both promoting networks of maintained long-distance hiking trails that can encourage hiking as well as linking the people and organizations making trails behind the scenes.

#### Guidelines

- Find and show long-distance (>30 km) hikes in Canada; identify their parent organizations
- shorter (>15 km) trails OK to include in some areas to encourage more hiking, to identify regional linkage possibilities

- exact gps data useful; however, the map is only a guide to location, a sense of each trail
- if many trails, just focus on core routes
- optimistically, include closed trails; priorities might re-align to reopen
- connect trail organizations
- encourage trail volunteerism
- promote long distance hiking trails
- entice people to hike long distances
- point people to current hiking resources

- accept that the map and databases are really snapshots in time; they need community input
- accept that is only a first draft of a huge project; this is especially so for the database of organizations

#### Long-distance hiking\*

Hiking trails across Canada vary wildly. Some skill with map and compass is useful as some hikes involve crossing unmarked or difficult or terrain where hikers must figure out their own route. Each must also decide whether their level of fitness is sufficient for any particular route.

Wildlife, snow, rain, fire, sun, water, hurricanes, budgets, local support are always considerations. Electronic devices need backup plans in case of cold, battery and network issues.

In some places hikes are within communities or linking communities using green corridors of parks and open spaces, sometimes using short road connections, or often, abandoned train routes — all are chances to learn local history. These urban routes are accessible by more people, some of whom might progress to walking more demanding and longer backcountry routes.

Canada also has Camino-type walks ... *through breathtaking countryside — but it is not a wilderness trek. The path goes through vineyards, meadows and forests; it also goes through cities, villages, suburbs, farmyards and industrial subdivisions. Portions of the route are along busy roads, and some routes are more isolated than others. In walking the Camino, you will experience the many different faces of the area, including the beautiful and the not-so beautiful. You will also get an in-depth appreciation for the people, their language, culture, architecture and lifestyle.*\*\*

#### Creating a map, a finding aid

Finding trails was/is tricky, however internet makes things feasible. Many organizations offer gps trail data on their sites.

A trail can be part of many hiking routes, with many names and can be hiked from different directions. Often a trail shows up on many

websites, each version slightly different.

We used Google Earth to organize trail data and its ©imagery to create maps. Links and trail names were added in Affinity Publisher.

We used Excel to create databases to store data on both the trails and the hiking organizations.

A key goal was to create an interesting and informative map with strong hyperlinks. Reading stories, newsletters, trip reports, plans, annual reports, etc. was inspirational — there are some awesome stories, and pictures.

#### What we’re finding

Seeing what other parts of the country are doing is very instructive, but the map and databases are still early drafts. We need to send the map to hiking organizations and hikers to get feedback.

#### Networking — what others are doing

Almost half of long-distance trails are in parks. Paved pathway, active transportation networks are common in cities. Old rail trails abound (if much motorized use, trail was not included; it’s hard to know for sure without local feedback.)

The map not only promotes long-distance hiking trails, it promotes networking and the diversity of the Canada’s hiking community is well worth reading about.

#### Nature and the Environment

Land stewardship, land trusts, are a couple of areas not often thought of when hiking. Some clubs have committee responsible for relations with land owners. Alberta has SAPAA: Stewards Helping Stewards!

The best part of hiking is the nature we walk in. Longer trails can help protect the continuity of natural spaces, helping them remain intact forests, wetlands, prairie. Planned trails can minimize our footprint and still allow us to hike in awesome natural places. Being observant of what’s around us makes hikers great nature ambassadors. We are Jane Jacob’s ‘eyes on the street’ for wildlife, green spaces, wilderness, protected areas.

Being naturalists, reading nature, adds another dimension to hiking. Observing wildlife, birds, flowers, trees, insects, slowing to peek at the omnipresent lichens, adds to the enjoyment of a hike. There are nature clubs all over Canada. Apps like iNaturalist can help learning.

#### Trail building, trail maintenance

We love a trail but who maintains it? A small bridge would make a trail better, but who will build it? Is there a volunteer crew?

Big national parks used to have large trail crews. Now there’s tighter budgets, more visitors, different priorities. Let’s not forget devastating

fires, floods, hurricanes!

In places, some trails are an hour drive from the community; in the Rockies and west into central BC, some are 2 days walk from a road so maintenance is more far difficult and costly so not often done.

Some people look for work parties happening on a trail they’re visiting. Club newsletters can advertise work parties. Some clubs have alumni for trail users. Some have volunteers bid to do maintenance on a trail. People come from away for GDT work parties.

Some organizations such as the Hardrock100 have service requirements for entry lotteries and obligatory qualifications such as “Construction work on a new or existing natural-surface trail under the supervision of a formal trail maintenance organization operating under permit by the appropriate land agency, not necessarily on a trail used by an ultra.”

What programming are others doing, what they do to attract hikers, volunteers? Kid hikes, group hike programs, car pooling, senior clubs, training for trail leaders, interpreted trails, cabins, huts, strategies, fundraising, newsletters, management plans, annual reports, papers, post disaster plans...

Together trail maintenance groups could advocate for provincial or national programs on trail development, trail maintenance, devise ways to encourage more participation by youth, develop processes for building smart inexpensive trail bridges, boardwalks, signage, training trail workers... We could also advocate for tourism initiatives to value hiking as much more than the short easy strolls often offered.

#### Regional development, signature trails

Clusters of smaller regional trails could be part of signature destination if conceptually linked.

A visitor could come and spend a few nights in a community contributing to its economic health and every day hiking new trails.

- Newfoundland's Northern Peninsula shows efforts in regional development
- NB's Grand Manan has a good start
- Barkerville has gps data for 22 small heritage trails (92 km) and has newsletter

Our map also promotes bigger, long-term trail initiatives, awareness of trail problems, walking festivals and various hiker events.

- See Blue Heron Way, South Whiteshell Trail Association, NWORTA's grand 5-phase plan.

There are many shorter trails but due to space on the map we will only put them on the map where there are few or no long trails.

### Canada’s National Hiking Network

Designating maintained hiking trails in Canada to promote the preservation of the natural environment, have public access and enjoyment and appreciation of the open-air, with access to outdoor areas and historic resources of Canada.

#### What is a designated National Hiking Trail

A designated hiking trail is a route that’s been set aside for hikers to use and has been registered with Hike Canada En Marche. These trails range from 30 km or more, in Canada, predominately for hiking, and are publicly accessible.

#### How are designated trails managed?

Land management agencies identify designated trails which are inventoried and mapped. These trails are signed on the ground and managed to ensure sustainable use.

#### Why designate trails?

To protect recreation infrastructure. To ensure public safety. To enhance trail experiences. To improve sustainable use of trails. To encourage people to explore new trail opportunities in their region and throughout Canada.

#### How can you find designated trails?

Check the Hike Canada En Marche map for all designated trails, names of which are shown with green underlines.



\* Modified from <https://ldwa.org.uk>, \*\* from [www.santiago.ca/faqs-about-the-camino/](http://www.santiago.ca/faqs-about-the-camino/)