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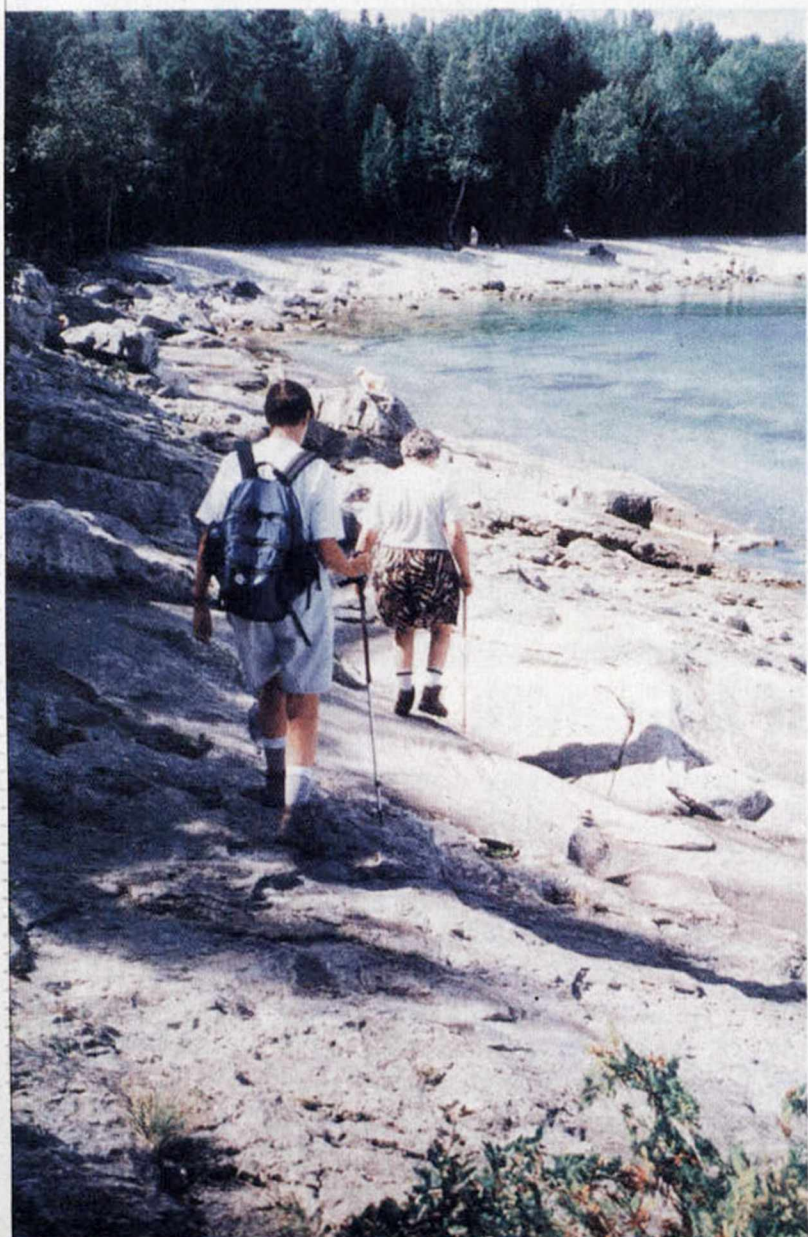
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Pathfinders walk the Bruce Trail



Anna Lee • Special to the Beaver
The Pathfinders hike along the Bruce Trail where it hugs the rocky shore of Georgian Bay in the Bruce Peninsula.

Last year, 10 Pathfinders followed in the footsteps of their 'forefathers' and hiked the 800-kilometre Bruce Trail.

Groups of the Pathfinders, an organization of senior hikers based at the Sir John Colborne Centre for Seniors, completed the Bruce Trail in 1995, 1998 and 2001.

The group often sang old Second World War songs. Two of them brought their harmonicas. They also sang a five-year-old Pathfinders theme song as they hiked from Queenston to Tobermory.

*"It's a long way to Tobermory
It's a long way to go
It's a long way to Tobermory
On the greatest trails we know
Goodbye silly telly
Farewell city square
It's a long, long way to Tobermory
But we will ... get there."*

The group began hiking on Jan. 15, 2002 and finished on Sept. 6, initially trekking two days a week and later three.

"As it turned out, favourable weather allowed us to reach Georgian Bay on May 22 and commence hiking in the three consecutive day mode," wrote Pathfinders hike leader Peter Duynstee.

"None of the 59 day hikes were rained out and ponchos were severely tested only once during a severe thunderstorm.

"Improvements in stamina were noticeable after three or four hikes and feelings of euphoria and well-being made hiking addictive, despite occasional exhaustion, blisters and minor injuries," he wrote in his report.

"We were equipped to combat black flies, mosquitoes and poison ivy, and we were ready for snakes, torrential rains, icy conditions and sunburn, but little materialized or appeared to matter significantly."

The hikers averaged 70 years of age, with some in their late 50s and others in their mid-70s.

Hiking through winter, spring and summer, the hikers encountered deep, crusty and soggy snow and ice. "We strapped our spiky soles, called icers,

onto our boots," said Duynstee. High waterproof boots kept the hikers' feet warm and dry.

"In early spring the season went into reverse, punishing us with a 30-minute, 100-Kmh blizzard."

They slogged through mud the consistency of potter's clay, enjoyed "wonderful long views" through the leafless bush, and as the weather warmed up, the melting snow gave way to early spring flowers and trilliums as they trekked north.

"We had unusually hot weather in August, occasionally very humid," continued Duynstee.

"We enjoyed gorgeous views from the escarpment over Georgian Bay past Meaford, Owen Sound, Wiarton and rock outcrops and rugged terrain. Looking down more than 100 metres, you see the turquoise, blue and gray bay and pebble beaches, some with giant outcropped rocks or large flat areas."

The Pathfinders is a 100-member hiking group. Members hike every Monday and Thursday, leaving from the Sir John Colborne Centre at 8:45 a.m.



Lloyd Wilson • Special to the Beaver
Netta Duynstee takes a break at a rocky lookout along the Bruce Trail.



Trayten Jensen • Special to the Beaver
At the snowy start of their end-to-end hike of the Bruce Trail at Queenston Heights on Jan. 15, 2002, are from left, Kurt Peterson, Anna Lee, Joyce Jensen, Maya Holland, Lloyd Wilson, Netta Duynstee, Emmett Berrigan, Mary O'Sullivan, Arthur Holland and Peter Duynstee.

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