

On the job, L-R: trails project manager Barry Moerkerken, President Rob Brockley, Trails Ops chair Peter Danenhower.

 $\mathbf{Y}^{ ext{ear}}$ round we clip trails all around the island to keep them passable. We manage GaLTT's signage on trail licences and rights of way, replacing outdated or vandalized signs (sadly, this still happens), and we report to RDN Parks, BC Parks, or Islands Trust Conservancy any damage to their signage. Some of our trails become minor streams in winter, so in the Fall, we cleared the ditches (again!) along the River Place Trail in Cox Park to allow winter rainwater run-off. Early in June our crew redirected the Church Street to Tin Can Alley trail onto the street allowance so that it can remain open during nearby development. Later in June the crew trimmed the well-loved trails in Haven Woods, which were recently realigned to allow for the landowner's privacy at their new home. In November we built a new connecting trail between the two sections of Chichester Road up near Orlebar Point. And at the end of the year we completed more trail connection work in Cox-Descanso-Haven-Malaspina area to complement the McConvey Trail.

Boardwalks

Our four September and October work parties were entirely occupied building magnificent raised boardwalks over the well-loved Macdonald to Peterson connector trails, which always flood badly in winter. Our intrepid, soggy work parties installed a total of 150 feet of new boardwalk, including covering the slippery surfaces with safety mesh.



ACCESSIBILITY SURVEY

For several years Gabriolans with disabilities have expressed their frustration at the lack of an accessible beach on this beautiful island. We have discussed this with BC and RDN parks officials, exploring what might be done and whether funding is available for the work. We were able to get some funding to explore the possibilities for improving access at Twin Beaches. We also conducted a survey about the best way to do that, expanding the questions to include the accessibility of our trails and parks more generally. During the spring we invited all Gabriolans to complete our survey, which included people using wheelchairs and walkers, those with fear of falling, those walking with infants in strollers, and those with sensory impairments.

A big thank-you to the 284 Gabriolans who filled in the survey. The results made it clear that islanders value accessibility to natural spaces, both for those with existing restrictions to mobility and for those who are part of an aging population. They specifically identified impediments to access and priorities for action. There were some clear contradictions in individual priorities, and we received thoughtful comments on the difficulty of balancing the wish to leave places in a natural state with making them more accessible. In November we received the final report of the complex survey from Wave Consulting, and the committee met at year's end to discuss how best to quickly focus on some actions in the short term to improve shore access to at least one beach and to provide at least one level, accessible trail loop in our park system.



GUIDED WALKS & EVENTS

Cross Gabriola Trek

We kicked off the summer in June with our Cross-Gabriola Trek via this year's lovely new 13.5 km route from Joyce Lockwood park to the Golf Club. Over 50 people started from the end of Whalebone trekking along the beautiful forested coastal cliffs, and then up and across the middle of the island. We walked entirely on public trails apart from one very brief stretch along Degnen Road North after we passed through Elder Cedar Nature Reserve. From there, we walked the complex trail system through the Government lands to Tait Road. Then we followed nicely clipped (thank you trailwork crew!) Central Island Trail parallel to North Rd, to connect with the 707 Community Park trails. This allowed us to celebrate the RDN's completion of the newly numbered signage system in the enlarged 707 Community Park, making a large meandering loop and finishing by taking the newly public south-western trail down to the Golf Club for very welcome refreshments.

Summer events—night and day

On a sunny July afternoon, a dozen people of varied ages met Nick Doe at Blue Heron Park to gather interesting-looking rocks from Whalebone Beach and learn what they were and when and how they ended up on a Gabriola beach. The next evening another group joined Rob Brockley in Elder Cedar Nature Reserve to enjoy "forest bathing"—a contemplative walk using all five senses to quietly savor the forest environment; an experience called *shinrin yoku* in Japan.

In August we tried something new—board member Libby Gunn led a night walk in Cox Park, teaching us how to safely enjoy the forest sights and sounds by moonlight without bright flashlights. At the end of the month Derrill Shuttleworth led a night biking group through 707 trails.

STRATEGIC PLANNING **2020-25**

"Conserve and Connect"

In November members were invited to join the board in drawing up the new 2020–2025 Strategic Plan. We assessed our work and successes in following the 2015–2020 Strategic Plan and discussed the importance and difficulties of balancing our work on trails with our conservation mandate as we go forward. We agreed that in recent years our "public face" has been more about our trail work, and recognized the need to focus more of our energy on conservation. To this end we've begun planning for work in the new year to identify conservation opportunities and projects and provide a framework for taking action in this area. The new Strategic Plan can be downloaded from our website.

DIGITAL ADVANCES

"Why did we do that?"—Data Management

A challenge facing every small organization is making sure that valuable information doesn't get lost as volunteers come and go. This year we obtained a TechSoup Canada account, which enabled us to purchase discounted software and obtain a free Google "G-Suite for Non-Profits" account with 30 GB of cloud storage. We are now building an online database as a "master" repository for at least some of our records (and yes, we do keep local backups!). The first thing moved to the cloud was our developing database on trails. If you have any information that you think might be a useful or interesting addition to these records, especially on the history of our trails, please send it to nolaj@galtt.ca.

Trails Atlas

We've begun working on a new long-term project: an online "digital trails atlas" (starting with the ABC trails on our printed map). When complete it will be linked from our website and will provide more information on what to expect on these trails and routes: practical details about the trail, what you'll see, features of special interest, the geology and ecology of the route, and so on. We hope it will provide more insights to locals and serve as a useful tool for visitors.

WINDSTORMS' EFFECTS

Violent windstorms and unusually heavy snowfalls added to the work of our hardy trail stewards and work crews early in 2019, supplying plenty of extra debris to be cleared from the trails. Our February 10 AGM, preceded by Guest Speaker Dr Richard Hebda, had to be cancelled at the last minute when snow made the roads impassable. We rescheduled the 2019 AGM to March, but ironically could not reschedule the talk on "Climate Change and the Gulf Islands". Fortunately Dr. Hebda will present at the March 3, 2020 AGM.

OUR NEW TRAIL MAP

and improved 707 signage

Since 2016 there have been many changes to our trail system, most significantly the addition of 340 acres to 707 Community Park through a density transfer in 2018. For years walkers had complained of becoming disoriented and ending up lost outside the not-obvious park boundaries. As a result of GaLTT's advocacy, the RDN is completely revamping the 707 wayfinding system. All 89 posts at trail intersections (including 49 new posts installed by GaLTT volunteers) have been re-

numbered, and improved directional signage will be installed in Spring 2020. Our new map includes a detailed inset of showing the numbered trail connections in 707 Community Park and Coats Marsh Regional Park.

In addition, many new licensed trails through private land have been added since the previous edition, and we discussed with Snunéymuxw First Nation how best to ensure that their reserve lands and significant cultural sites are appropriately marked and named in Hul'qumi'num. We have also highlighted the extensive areas being held by provincial and federal governments for treaty settlement.

ANNUAL BROOMBASH

-bigger than ever!

On April 28 GaLTT and the Lions Club held the annual kick-off broom-bash in Drumbeg Park. Sixty-four volunteers turned up to help clear a large area near the trees, revealing some camas lilies still bravely blooming. GaLTT's team (led by Lou Skinner and Peter Danenhower) supplied tools, tips, and labour, Lions supplied the hotdogs and drinks (and more labour), and BC Parks staff brought their huge bags and trucks to haul away the cut broom for disposal off island. Fourteen brave volunteers had already jumped the gun by tackling the big patch of broom near the south firehall, leaving it in heaps for chipping. Neighbourhood cuts continued until the broom went to seed. The broom was transported by the Lions Club to a central location for supervised burning when permitted. THANK YOU ALL!

CONSERVATION

through covenants and invasives control

Currently our principle initiatives toward conservation on Gabriola are holding covenants on properties and controlling the spread of invasive plants. Conservation covenants prevent or tightly control development on the land, preventing destruction of its ecology. When private covenanted land changes hands, we ensure that new owners are fully aware of the terms of the covenant. We annually monitor the covenants



we hold, and where adverse effects on their ecology occur, work to improve the situation and preserve native species. So, in September, several brave GaLTT bushwhackers ventured way off the trails in Robinson Woods near Cooper Road to clip a bad infestation of mature ivy growing up the trees. Previous work parties had tackled a patch of giant hogweed, and neighbours were alerted to invasive plants on their own properties, inviting them to remove them to help prevent their spread.

NEW COMMITMENTS

to conserve and connect—and lots more work

In the absence of paid staff, it is necessary to have a large board with varied interests and skills. In recent years GaLTT's busy working board (with the help of a group of devoted volunteers) has greatly increased its workload. We now have about 80 km of public trails on Gabriola (about half in the 707), many of which are officially maintained by GaLTT. Several new trails have recently been established as we pursue our goal of improving neighbourhood connectivity, but when new trails are made, they must be maintained. The important conservation part of our mandate requires that the potential impacts of trail-building on sensitive ecosystems and natural habitat be carefully considered when investigating potential new trail routes. Meanwhile, our conservation team is always looking for new opportunities to protect land through conservation covenants and land acquisition and the control invasive plants.

As our work evolves, new committees form and more tasks are taken on. In recent years we supported formation of the Streamkeepers, and we have also created Gabriola's Big Tree registry at www.gabriolabigtrees.galtt.ca. Two new board members in 2019 enabled us to develop the board's work on invasive plants and on sharing trails with cyclists. We've been also been recruiting committee members to take on higher-level responsibilities; in 2019 Barry Moerkoerken took on the Project Management role on the Trail Operations committee, reducing chair Peter Danenhower's workload a bit, and at the end of the year Hugh Skinner took on chairing our new ad hoc Shore Access committee. Our sincere thanks to both for stepping up when needed.





Conservation—Invasives Committee

Of course, invasive plant control is not only about broombashing. GaLTT's work continues all through the growing season dealing with all the other invasives common on Gabriola—Daphne laureola, Tansy ragwort, English ivy, Japanese knotweed, Giant hogweed, periwinkle, yellow flag iris, and beloved Himalayan blackberry. The work has become so time consuming that GaLTT decided a separate Invasives Committee was needed, with a specific band of member volunteers. Lou Skinner and Libby Gunn are setting up the committee, which Libby will chair. To help control invasive plants contact Libby: invasives@galtt.ca.



Sharing the trails—Cycling Committee

When GaLTT started, there were mostly walkers on our trails, with a significant smaller group of horse-riders. Now we are seeing a lot more bicycles. Some have found this transition in trail use confusing—even scary— so one thing we managed this past year was the installation of "Share the Trails" signage at significant trailheads, indicating that cyclists must give way to walkers, and everyone must give way to horses. But cyclists come in various forms: mountain bikers, commuters, and, increasingly in recent years, e-bikers. Park boards have different rules regarding e-bikes—some

ban them, others restrict their use. And there's the question of wheels in general: are the needs of off-road commuters different than recreational cyclists? What about whizzing mountain bikers? How can cyclists safely and happily coexist with walkers, dogs, and horses? To sort some of these issues out, GaLTT has formed a Cycling Committee, initially chaired by Derrill Shuttleworth.

WE'RE LOOKING FOR **VOLUNTEERS!**

Please join any of GaLTT's working committees and bring your skills and energy to help spread our everincreasing workload. Email info@galtt.ca and we'll put you in contact with the right group for your interests.

And by the way—although we've had good turnouts at our special invasive-bashing activities, lately the number of people (especially women) coming out to help with the regular Sunday trail-building and maintenance tasks has dropped off. Now's your chance to wield a wheelbarrow or a hammer, or clippers—and let your inner labourer out

> for the good of all. Don't let it pass you by! To volunteer, contact trailwork@galtt.ca or invasives@galtt.ca



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