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Cathy's Trans Canada Trail: Making Friends One Step at a Time

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Written by Cathy Donaldson

After a winter hike with the Women of the Wilderness (WOW), I was hooked.

I'd heard about the New Brunswick group a year or two earlier and was keen to connect with gals who enjoy hanging out in nature for hikes, camping and other outdoor fun.

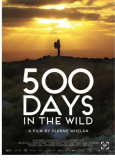
I also appreciated WOW's focus on kindness, respect and trust. The fact that there's no cost to sign up is a bonus. Those wishing to join simply request membership in a Facebook group and check for events they might like to attend. Such an awesome, inclusive way for women to improve their physical and mental health!

In March, I tagged along with a small squad of WOW members for a hike in Riverview's Mill Creek Nature Park, on the Town of Riverview Trail section of the Trans Canada Trail. The welcoming crew filled me in on some of their past adventures as our boots crunched along the snow-packed, scenic trail. I left the outing with rosy cheeks, a warm heart and six new friends.



'Spring Fling' on the Dobson Trail

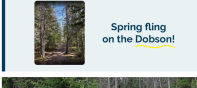
A day later, I met many more WOW gals at a special screening of *500 Days in the Wild* by Canadian filmmaker Dianne Whelan. We packed a local theatre to watch the gripping documentary, which described Whelan's six-year journey of hiking, biking, paddling, snowshoeing and skiing the Trans Canada Trail, the world's longest recreational trail.



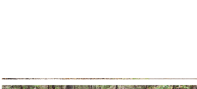
trail inspired by Whelan's epic journey, I created a post on WOW's Facebook page a few weeks later suggesting an April hike. (Any WOW member can organize an event.) The "Spring Fling" would take place on a five-kilometre section of the Dobson Trail, a hiking-only section of the Trans Canada Trail stretching 58 kilometres from Riverview, New Brunswick, to the northern boundary of Fundy National Park. My proposed hike would repeat WOW's winter solstice excursion: an out-and-back loop with a stop halfway for snacks and conversation.

While she couldn't make the hike, WOW founding member Sarah Lord was all for the idea. A health and wellness coordinator in the area, Lord told me the Trans Canada Trail is a frequent destination for the group and the community at large.

"For Riverview's 50th anniversary last year, I received a grant for Nordic walking poles and something I called the Riverview 50 Spring Urban Pacing Trans Canada Trail Challenge," she said. "We walked the Trans Canada Trail from Riverview's Winter Wonderland Park to Dover Park in Dieppe. We broke it up into four sections over four days to make it more manageable for everyone and had a potluck at the end. It was a lot of fun."



On the day of the "Spring Fling" I'd organized, the weather gods cooperated with sunshine and mild temps. A gaggle of 20 WOW members met at the start of the Dobson Trail, named after avid outdoorsman Dr. Art Dobson, who started the initiative to build the trail in 1959. After a quick group photo, we set out, a chorus of chatter and laughter soon echoing through the forest. As we meandered, I chatted with event participants, who ranged in age from 20 to 60 plus, including some of the collective's founding members.



'It just took off from there'



Gail Everett (pictured above) happily recalled how the concept for WOW came together in 2015 during an urban pacing course led by Lord.

"A few of us got talking about how we really liked hiking and camping," said Everett. "We decided to go camping on a September weekend that year. It was very cold, but we had such a good time! We enjoyed each other's company and did a lot of hiking. We decided to make a Facebook group and organize some hikes and other events. It just took off from there. Last year we had our fifth anniversary celebration and we're now up to more than 3,800 members. It's been pretty amazing!"



Over time, WOW subgroups have been created for specific activities, she said.

"Some women don't hike but come for the social [aspect], for company," said Everett. "That's the wonderful thing about the WOW community. There's everything from crafting to board games. It's a great way to connect with women who have similar interests."

Some women have joined from outside the Marston region, including from Fredericton and Saint John. Meanwhile, WOW subgroups in those communities have started posting events for those areas.

"WOW just keeps growing," said Everett.



Doreen Glenne-Cruikshank (pictured above, standing), another founding member, said she has always felt a connection with nature but hadn't spent much time outdoors.

"This group gives us all some freedom to get out because many of us, like me, won't go by ourselves," she said. "When I go, I like to be in the back of the group, where it's quiet. I love taking pictures. I'm by myself but I like knowing there are people here."



Julie Kean Marks (pictured above, middle row, second from right, blue shirt) said she has belonged to other outdoor groups but loves the variety of activities WOW offers both regionally and across the province.

"We've done so many fun things, from floating down the Miramichi River on inner tubes to kayaking in the Bay of Fundy and, of course, all kinds of different hikes," said Kean Marks. "I like that this group is just for women. It's a different dynamic and such a welcoming group."

Cathy Donaldson is a travel writer and photographer based in Moncton, New Brunswick (in green shirt, front row, last photo).

Read more about her adventures at:

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