



LANDOWNER RELATIONS MANUAL

OAK RIDGES TRAIL ASSOCIATION

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PREFACE

This manual is intended as a guide for dealing with property owners. It covers dealings with the owners of land for potential trail routes as well as dealing with owners of property once the trail is in place

The initial version of this manual was adapted from the Bruce Trail's Landowner Relations Manual (May 1993).

INTRODUCTION

Due to heavy settled and industrialized areas on the Oak Ridges Moraine, the trail necessarily will need to cross privately owned land. This can only happen thanks to the generosity of landowners. It is important to ensure that as a club everything is done to ensure that landowners view the trail in a positive manner.

Based on the experience of the Bruce Trail one of the most common concerns/problems raised by landowners relates to trail changes occurring on their land without their permission or knowledge. Another complaint is that they don't hear from the club frequently enough. Also landowners express concerns that they don't know who to contact regarding problems related to trail maintenance or improper use.

More than one landowner has asked that the trail be removed from their property out of frustration over concerns that they could not get answered due to lack of contact. It is unrealistic and unreasonable to think that all landowners will be proactive in bringing problems to our attention, especially when they may not know who to contact.

Conversely, landowners who mention how happy they are with their relationship with the Club tend to know and hear from members of the club regularly. Personal contact with Club members on a fairly frequent basis really helps improve landowner relations and avoid the situation of small problems growing large over time.

CONTACTING LANDOWNERS

It should be clear that the underlying premise for success in getting permission to cross private land is developing a trusting, respectful relationship with landowners. It is not just the actions one does - a personalized introductory letter, a telephone call and a personal visit - that counts, but personality and attitude that ultimately help determine your success. The aim should be to win the respect and cooperation of the landowner. Little will be gained by trying to force your opinion and objectives on a landowner. The final decision on permission for Trail location will rest with the landowner.

It is suggested that the landowner contact may consist of three logical steps:

1. a letter to the landowner explaining ORTA and our needs for a Trail site and requesting an appointment.
2. a phone call to set up the appointment
3. the visit

These steps are not mandatory – circumstances may alter your approach – but a few words about each step may be of assistance:

1. A letter must be informative, introducing yourself and the ORTA, be polite and easily understood. People are much more likely to read a short letter - try not to exceed one page. Credibility is gained by using ORTA letterhead. Don't use a form letter - make it personal!
2. A week or so after sending a letter, a phone call will establish personal contact. Besides introducing yourself, the primary purpose of the call is to arrange a personal visit. Being polite, respectful, patient and considerate during the conversation is extremely important. Be a good listener if issues or questions arise. If the owner become critical be diplomatic. Keep in mind that first impressions are often the most important. Avoid leaving messages on answering machines, if possible, but try to get the landowner in person.

After introducing yourself and ORTA refer to your letter. Was it received? Have they had a chance to read it? If yes, you are probably over your biggest hurdle. Although you can be mildly persistent, you should also be very sensitive to the owner's responses to you.

3. The visit will initiate or maintain open lines of communication between the landowner and ORTA. Our contact must be viewed as an ongoing process. Be honest and above all, maintain a high level of respect for landowners - they own the land on which you wish to hike.

An information kit should also be given to the landowner to help "sell" the trail. This kit could include:

- copies of Trail Talk
- copy of our liability insurance document (current copies available from secretary)
- map showing the trail in the area around the landowner's property. Note that the route across the landowner's property should not be assumed - i.e. show it as a proposed route.
- photos of the trail
- reference to our trail building standards
- Copy of the government publication on Trespass and Occupiers Act (current copies available from secretary). This document describes what the landowner is liable for and what a person using the trail would be liable for.

PROPERTY INFORMATION SHEETS

Property information sheets should be completed for all private land which the Trail crosses. These sheets should be kept by the responsible person in the local section, as well as a copy sent to the trail director.

Whenever a change is made to the route or land ownership the information sheet should be updated.

HONORARY MEMBERS

All landowners are considered as honorary members of ORTA and as such will receive Trail Talk at no charge.

The membership director should be informed of all new or changed landowners so that the landowner will receive their complimentary copies of the newsletter.