



THE FIRST 50 YEARS



kolaporetails.org





A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The origins of the Kolapore Trails can be traced to a ski trip by members of the University of Toronto Outing Club to the McGill Outing Club's house in the Laurentians in February 1973. This trip introduced us to the traditional ski trails of the Laurentians and the fun of wilderness skiing. Subsequent exploration around the UTOC Cabin at Metcalfe Rock revealed that the area had tremendous potential for cross-country skiing, and the idea of the Kolapore Trails was born. I couldn't have imagined then that I would still be so involved and enthusiastic about the trails half a century later!

A federal Opportunities for Youth Grant allowed workers to be hired in the summer of 1973. They laid a lot of groundwork and established the first trails. UTOC volunteers greatly expanded the initial trail network that autumn. The trails officially opened in December 1973. The first winter was a great success. Members of the Outing Club fell in love with skiing in the Kolapore Uplands, and a few other skiers managed to find the trails, guided by a rudimentary map that sold for 25 cents.

After fifty years, many things have changed. The trails are now managed for biking and hiking in addition to cross-country skiing. Trail and bridge standards have been upgraded substantially. The trails are managed by the Kolapore Wilderness Trails Association, and UTOC has no formal role. The awareness and popularity of the Kolapore Uplands have increased dramatically, partly because of the trails. Over time there has been increased recognition of the very significant natural values of the Kolapore area and the need to protect it.

What hasn't changed is the desire to have a great wilderness trail network managed by dedicated volunteers. I look forward to continuing to work with other volunteers and hope that these trails will continue to lead people into nature for the next fifty years and beyond.

Sincerely,

Bruce

Bruce King
PRESIDENT, KWTA

1970s

THE BEGINNING

Just before Christmas 1973, University of Toronto Outing Club members held a ribbon cutting ceremony for the Kolapore Uplands Wilderness Ski Trails. Just ten months after these ambitious young people had dreamed up the idea of backcountry skiing in Kolapore, they'd created a basic trail network and a simple map.

Some of the original trails were largely theoretical – nothing more than lines on a map and flagging tape through the bush with minimal clearing. Other trails were distant from the UTOC cabin at Metcalfe Rock where most volunteers stayed. The farthest flung trails extended south and west of the Labyrinth.

The ambitious trail network can be seen on the 1973 Map on page 10. The Lake Eugenia trail extended about 3 km south and west of the Labyrinth, and the Wild West wandered around on old laneways to the west. Trail clearing volunteers from that era remember hiking back to the Outing Club Cabin long after dark.

A few of these trails were eliminated in 1974 so the club could focus on clearing and marking trails properly. The first good trail map was published in 1977. The County Forest trails, originally separate from the others, were connected to the rest of the Kolapore network when John's Portage was built in 1979.

The 1970s saw a rapid increase in participation in cross-country skiing, and newspapers and magazines were looking for trails that their readers would enjoy. The Kolapore trails were promoted in a Grey- Bruce winter recreation publication in late 1974 – squeezed between articles about snowmobiling. The Globe and Mail published a short note about the trails in 1975, and in 1978 it published a long article about spring skiing on the Kolapore trails. This type of publicity led to a significant increase in winter trail use.



1980s

GROWING UP

UTOC established a Kolapore Trails Committee and during the 1970s and 1980s, dedicated volunteers spent many work weekends maintaining and upgrading the trails. Southern Crossing, Northwest Passage and Kingsway were added during this period. The Ministry of Natural Resources expressed concerns about the recurring requests for authorization to build new trails, so in 1988 the Trails Committee prepared a Trail Management Plan, which outlined proposed new trails.

Starting in 1980 an annual Kolapore Trail News was distributed to trail users. In the days before email, printed newsletters were tucked into trail maps, and also packaged in baggies that were left in Trail News boxes at several entrances.

User surveys were conducted three times in the 1980s to obtain information on who was using the trails and what their concerns and preferences were. The number one request was to provide washrooms – but that didn't happen for several decades.

The Kolapore Nordic Ski Patrol was established in 1982 and replaced by Kolapore Trail Guides in 1986. In response to concerns about roadside parking the Ministry of Natural Resources built the Kolapore Uplands parking lot on the east side of Grey Road 2 in 1985.

1990s

ESTABLISHED

The vast trail network continued to be maintained by volunteers, who by this time were mostly members of the local community, helped out by UTOC members. In the early days, some locals had been wary of the “young outsiders” who had introduced new recreational activities to the Kolapore Uplands but by this time, the community had embraced the trails.

In 1996, government agencies asked UTOC to remove the nailed-on metal trail blazes that had been used since the start. Changing over to painted blazes was a major project.

Mountain biking arrived in Kolapore, bringing a new wave of trail users. Because the trails had been designed and maintained for skiing, some adjustments were required. In 1993, several trails were designated as “winter use only”. In 1995, the Committee obtained a significant grant from Mountain Equipment Co-op to support remedial trail work and installation of “Mountain Bike Code of Ethics” signs.

In 1999, the Kolapore Wilderness Trails held its 25th Anniversary celebration at Heathcote Hall. Attendees famously caused the floor to collapse when they gathered at one end for a group photo!



2000s

Changing Times

The Kolapore Trails map was redesigned significantly, using digital technology to replace the original hand-drawn cartography. During this era, many bridges were upgraded and replaced, particularly those with natural log spans. The trail network continued to be managed by a committee loosely affiliated with UTOC although there were no longer any student members.

In 2004, a lawsuit initiated by an injured cyclist made it clear that an independent organization should be created to take full responsibility for the trails. Hundreds of trail users expressed their concerns about the future of the Kolapore Trails.

2010s

The KWTA

In 2010, the Ministry of Natural Resources built the Metcalfe Rock parking lot used by Bruce Trail hikers, rock climbers and Kolapore Trails users.

In 2011, the Kolapore Wilderness Trails Association (KWTA) incorporated as a non-profit and took over the management of the trails. The Kolapore Uplands Wilderness Ski Trails were renamed to the Kolapore Wilderness Trails, reflecting the expanded responsibilities of the new member-based organization. A new website, email ID, logo and Facebook page were created. Member social events created stronger relationships on and off the trail.

In 2013, KWTA held a large public meeting to develop a longer-term vision for the trails. The organization worked to bring modern standards to its trail construction and management. They hosted a "trail school" taught by staff of the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA). Major bridges were now designed by engineers, including large bridges on Paradise Highway and at the Northwest Passage/Quiet Pastures intersection. KWTA funded its first course on safe chainsaw operation for interested volunteers.

In 2016, a volunteer began a major sign replacement project at all trail intersections, which continued to 2023.





2020s

50th Anniversary Celebrations

In 2020 and 2021, the trails saw record use due to Covid-related restrictions on other activities. In 2022, Grey County built a paved parking lot at the east end of the County Forest trails. In 2023, the first significant new trail in 30 years – Kev’s Way – officially opened.

The 50th Anniversary celebrations of the Kolapore Wilderness Trails were kicked off in the spring of 2023 and scheduled to continue through the winter of 2023-2024. Special plans included tree planting, an AGM celebration, a Heritage Hike series with local experts, themed ski outings, a Celebration evening at the Marsh Centre, and partner events with local mountain biking, orienteering and trail running organizations.



MEMORABLE MOMENTS

THE DAM BUSTERS

In the mid-1980s, a trail clearing crew discovered that part of John's Portage trail had been seriously flooded due to beaver activity. The bridge that had crossed a small stream was now bobbing in the water. Removing the dam was the obvious solution - or so it seemed. A crew of young Kolapore volunteers went at the task with gusto and were delighted as a flood of water swept through the opened beaver dam.

The volunteers headed back to the UTOC Cabin for dinner, only to have an outraged local resident storm in a short time later. We soon learned that Bill B. owned property downstream from the beaver dam and was working on stream improvement to provide better fish habitat. The water flooding through the dam had carried sediment with it, and sediment is bad for fish spawning. OOPs!

After much apologizing and promising to never do it again, we managed to develop a rapport with Bill. Over the years he became a big supporter of the trails. And what we really learned is that it is almost impossible to fight beavers. The dam was soon rebuilt, and we moved the trail downstream to where it is today. If you go by, you can see the old beaver dam, which is currently dormant - but we never take that for granted.



THE TRAIL HAS DISAPPEARED

In July 1999 we received a call from a local mountain biker saying that the trail at the top of Wild Mouse had disappeared. Several Kolapore volunteers set off, saws and pruners in hand, only to find that several hundred metres of the trail had been obliterated. It was apparent that this was the result of a tornado that had skipped through the area.

Researchers subsequently concluded that it was an F2 tornado with wind speeds of 160 -230 km/hr. In the Wild Mouse area, an estimated 500 - 1000 trees had been felled. Kolapore chainsaw volunteers went in to do a clean-up but discovered that parts of the trail could not be reopened because so many trees had been uprooted, leaving large pits where the roots had been. Thus, we said a sad farewell to the middle run in Wild Mouse. And that's why the trail at the top of Wild Mouse goes from intersections 15 to 17 - the trail north from former intersection 16 disappeared.



THE DAY WE CUT THE PHONE LINES

Some years ago, a volunteer offered to build a proper entrance kiosk that would go into the Kolapore parking lot. The Board immediately accepted the offer. The volunteer built the entire structure and was willing to install it. He did suggest that perhaps we should “call before digging” but several Board members were convinced this wasn’t necessary. As the power auger went into the soil to dig the post holes, we noticed some bits of wire coming to the surface. Maybe we should stop and look at this... Soon a pickup truck roared into the parking lot, and two locals jumped out. “You’ve cut our phone service!” The line we had severed ran south for about 3 km and served a number of homes. Fortunately, one of the two was a Kolapore supporter, and although he wasn’t happy, he cut us some slack.

The next day, one of our Board members was driving by the site of the fiasco and noticed a Bell repairman stringing a temporary line. The Board member felt obliged to confess and was relieved that the repairman was also a Kolapore trail user and was reasonably sympathetic. He told us that he would need a good-sized hole to work in to splice the underground wires. If he had to call in a contractor to dig it, there would be a significant cost. He suggested that perhaps we could dig a hole. That afternoon a plea for help went out, and the next morning a substantial crew of volunteers arrived. A large hole was excavated by hand in short order, and the underground lines were reconnected later that day. The morals of the story are “call before you dig”, and it is important to have friends in the community!



THE TIGER PIT

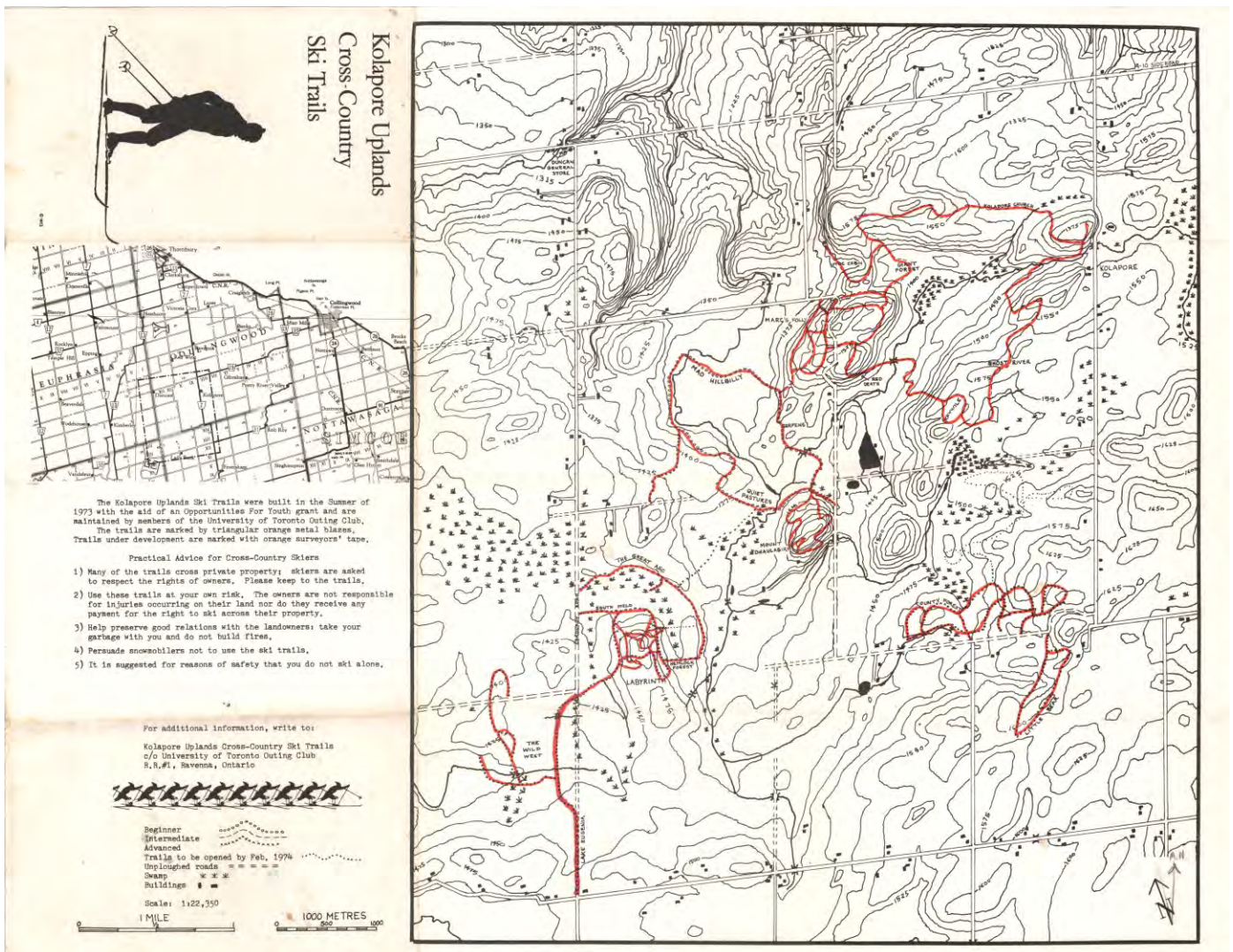
In the 1980s, a rock in the middle of intersection 15 at the central junction of five trails was a constant pain. It posed a significant problem for skiers, and in spite of a thorough search, we couldn’t find a better location for the trail. Of course, Kolapore volunteers rose to the challenge. A work crew headed out with numerous shovels to remove the rock. They started to dig. Then they dug some more. They dug more, and the rock kept getting bigger, as did the hole surrounding it.

As the hole grew, it started to be referred to as the Tiger Pit. Eventually it became obvious that it was not possible to move the rock to a new location. The engineers in the group then started scheming about tipping the rock enough to keep it below ground level - and that’s what they did. So as you go by intersection 15 today and don’t have to weave to avoid a rock at high speed, thank those early volunteers.

EARLY KOLAPORE MAPS

In late 1973, Kolapore volunteers scrambled to establish as many trails as possible. Opportunities For Youth workers constructed about 15 km of trail over the summer, and UTOC volunteers led by Brian Auld, John Cross and Bruce King “developed” another 20 km of trails in the fall. Much of the Kolapore Church – Paradise Highway loop was laid out and cleared by three volunteers in a single day, so you can imagine how these early trails existed more in theory than in practice.

The first map was produced using a very simple approach. The young volunteers took a slide photo of a topographic map, taped a piece of paper to the wall, projected the slide at the right scale, and transferred all the information onto the paper by hand. The map was printed in black and white, and volunteers coloured in the trails that were considered to be usable.



1977 MAP

Trail Descriptions

County Forest

A series of easy loop trails which follow winding bush roads in a young maple forest. This is an excellent area for novice skiers because of the wide trails and gentle slopes. The numbers shown on the map correspond to numbers painted on metal markers at the trail intersections. 6 km.

There are two access points to the County Forest: one is located at the intersection of Grey County Road 2 and the Collingwood - Osprey Townline Road, and the other at the intersection of the Townline and Osprey 10 Sideroad. At the first access point the trail starts immediately behind the "Grey County Forest" sign. Skiers starting here can park on the side of Grey Road 2 approximately 500 feet north of the Townline Road. At the second access point the trail starts on the north side of the Townline Road almost directly opposite Osprey 10 Sideroad. There is room for a few cars to park on the Sideroad.

Kolapore Church

Runs from Concession Road 10 to Grey County Road 2 at Kolapore, entirely through mature hardwood forests. Intermediate, but has several difficult runs, including the notorious "Deadmans Gulch". 4 km.

The entry to the trail system on Grey Road 2 is located immediately north of Kolapore Creek and follows an old laneway which is not blazed for the first 500 feet. The entry at Concession Road 10 follows the Bruce Trail part way up a driveway and then across a field. Roadside parking is possible at both entrances.

Labyrinth

With its elaborate maze of trails the Labyrinth lives up to its name! The major feature of the Labyrinth is a central hill on which runs ranging from easy to difficult are located. The only recommended access route is via the Quiet Pastures trail. 4 km.

Marc's Folly

This area offers a variety of trails ranging from easy to difficult winding through a managed forest. Several of the runs should be attempted only by competent intermediate skiers. Roadside parking is possible on 6-7 Sideroad at the northern entrance to Marc's Folly. 3 km.

Mount Dhaulagiri

A loop trail winds up to the lookout at the western end of Mount Dhaulagiri. The eastern half of the loop has a short steep downhill section near the bottom. 1.2 km.

New Church

A short trail that offers a challenging run when skiing south, and an interesting section through a cedar swamp. Runs between the Kolapore Church and Wild Mouse trails. 1 km.

Quiet Pastures

This trail connects the Trail to the Summit and the Labyrinth. The trail passes through gently rolling terrain with a mixture of abandoned pasture and forests, including one section of cedar swamp. Crosses Mitchell Creek on the S.J. Gamby bridge (caution required). 4 km.

Scared Old Lady

This trail connects Wild Mouse and Mount Dhaulagiri through rolling wooded countryside. When skiing from Wild Mouse the trail has a number of relatively gentle downhill runs. At about the midpoint the trail follows an unplowed road for about 300 feet - be alert for the cutoff points. There is no suitable parking place where the trail crosses Concession Road 10. 3 km.

Trail to the Summit

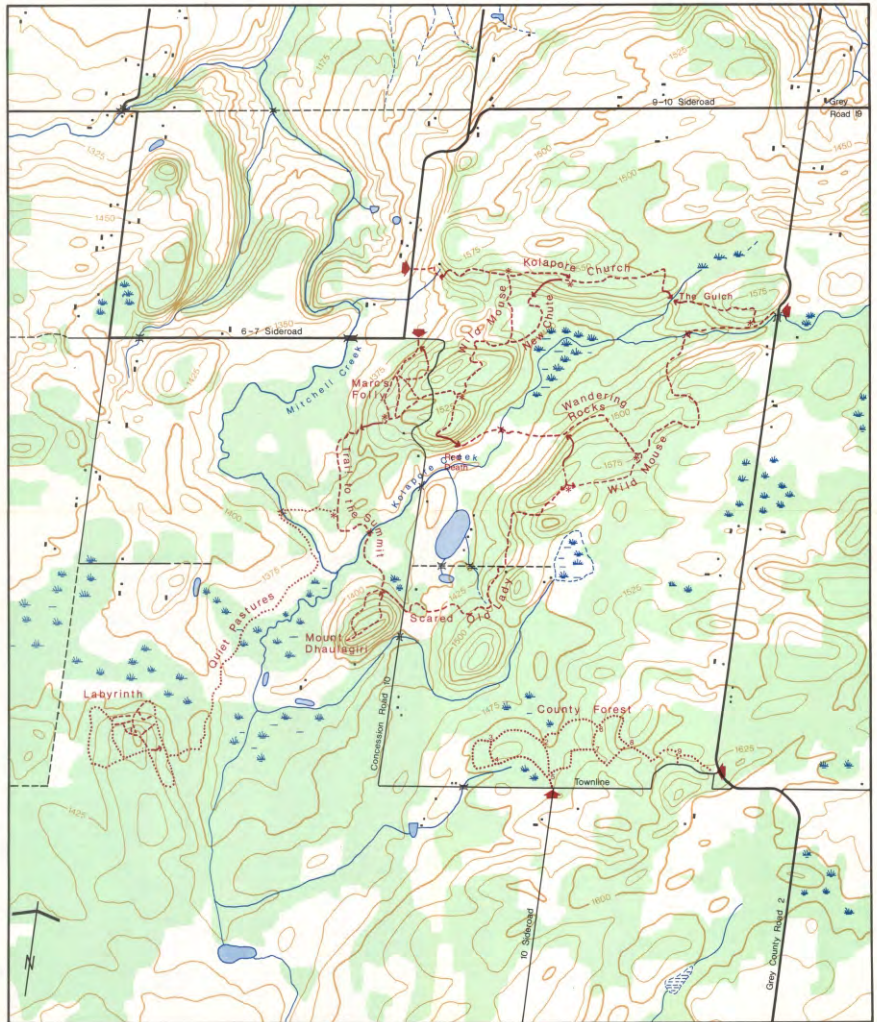
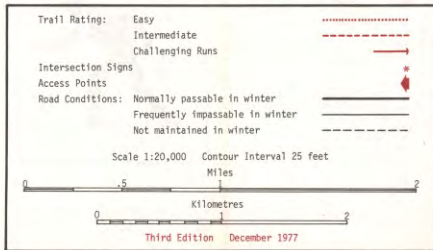
Runs from the southwest corner of Marc's Folly to Mount Dhaulagiri through fields, forest and a cedar swamp. This is an easy intermediate route except for two steep downhill runs which are encountered immediately after leaving Marc's Folly. 2.4 km.

Wandering Rocks

This trail bypasses several of the steeper hills on the Wild Mouse trail, and instead offers a hill suitable for most intermediate skiers. 1km

Wild Mouse

Runs from Kolapore to the Kolapore Church trail thereby forming a large loop. About two-thirds of this trail winds through mature hardwood forest while the rest runs through abandoned farm fields. The trail passes over relatively rolling terrain, and is designed for the intermediate to expert skier who enjoys challenging hills such as Red Death. The top of this trail offers an excellent view. Trail entry at Kolapore or via the Kolapore Church trail. 7.5 km.



After the first winter, it became clear that the original trail network plan had been too ambitious so over the next few years, it was trimmed down to a more reasonable size.

The 1977 map was the first high quality map produced. It shows that important connections were missing; the County Forest was still isolated, and the Labyrinth area was a "dead end". Northwest Passage didn't exist yet, nor did important portions of what is now Paradise Highway. Except for Labyrinth, most of the trails from this era still exist today, although there have been minor tweaks.

The trail map continued to use the same format until 2004, when our printer was no longer willing to work with large paper originals (one or more for each colour.) Fortunately, we were able to find a professional cartographer to bring us into the 21st Century with digital cartography. The volunteer who had done all the cartography since 1973 was delighted to be relieved of this responsibility.

TRAIL NAMES

Ever wonder where those trail names came from or how long the different trails have existed?

COUNTY FOREST 1973

For the first six years, these trails on Grey County land were not linked to the rest of the trail system.

JACKRABBIT TRAIL 1976

Named after the legendary Jackrabbit Johannsen, who developed many of the trails in the Laurentians that inspired the Kolapore Trails. Originally called "Scared Old Lady" after the landowner who turned down our request for permission, but subsequently renamed.

JOHN'S PORTAGE 1979

Named after John Cross, one of the original Kolapore trail builders and an avid canoeist.

KEV'S WAY 2022

Named for the late Kevin Walsh, a local adventurer and dedicated trail volunteer.

KINGSWAY 1989

Named after Bruce King, founder, perennial volunteer, current President of the Kolapore Wilderness Trails Association.

KOLAPORE CHURCH TRAIL 1973/82

The route from the University of Toronto Outing Club Cabin to the Kolapore Church. For several years, this trail only went through The Gulch.

MARC'S FOLLY 1973

A group of trails named for Marc Podell, who originated the idea of the Kolapore Trails. The "folly" trail disappeared in the early years.

MOUNT DHAULAGIRI 1973

At that time, it seemed that every outdoor gear company was providing equipment to the American Dhaulagiri Expedition. So we thought, "Why not have a Canadian Mount Dhaulagiri?" Needless to say, no equipment was forthcoming.

NEW CHUTE 1974

Replaced the original Chute, which only a handful of skiers were crazy enough to try, the one winter it existed.

NORTHWEST PASSAGE 1982/87/89/93

The longest trail and part of the "Magellan Loop" around the perimeter of the trail system.

PARADISE HIGHWAY 1973/85

The original version of this trail went up and down what is now Wild Mouse and also included Red Death. "Paradise" was the original name of Kolapore.

QUIET PASTURES 1973/74

Originally, the east end of this trail went directly to Mount Dhaulagiri.

RED DEATH 1973/88

The name actually refers to a winter camping drink, hot strawberry Jello.

SOUTHERN CROSSING 1980

The western segment (which no longer exists) used to be called Hemlock Forest.

TRAIL TO THE SUMMIT

1973/2005/2019: This trail was originally called Serpens. The summit referred to is, of course, Mount Dhaulagiri.

WILD MOUSE (1973/74/99):

This complex of trails includes parts of what used to be Ghost River, Wandering Rocks, Ski Jump and Keyhole Trails. The current name refers to a favourite ride at the CNE that, like the trails, provides lots of thrills. There used to be a middle run on the North side, but this was removed in 1999 due to tornado damage.

AND THEN THERE ARE THE TRAILS THAT HAVE DISAPPEARED:

- Bowles Loop and Wicked Baronet - some pieces of flagging tape marked these "trails" but they never really existed.
- Great Arc - north of the Labyrinth
- Labyrinth - a tangle of trails in the southwest corner of the network. This trail system existed for about 40 years.
- Little Bear - south of County Forest
- Mad Hillbilly - a small portion of this has been incorporated into Northwest Passage.
- The Wild West and Lake Eugenia - west and south of Labyrinth

Most of the trails that no longer exist were only "sort of" developed in 1973 and were removed in 1974.



Local Place Names

The Kolapore trails go through or pass a number of small communities, most of which were more substantial in the past. Kolapore was selected as a place name in 1884 when the post office was opened. Originally the name of the community had been "Paradise", but this name was already being used by another post office.

Kolapore, the second choice, is an anglicization of the name of a small state in India, which had been the site of a British military action. Kolapore had extensive lumbering activity and several sawmills. There was even a substantial factory which manufactured barrel hoops.

Little Germany on the 10th Line was named because one of the pioneer settlers was of Pennsylvania Dutch stock. Duncan (northwest corner of the Kolapore Uplands) was likely named in 1870 after the first teacher in the local school, Duncan Bole. Egypt, at the western edge of the Kolapore Uplands area on the Townline, was supposedly named after the Biblical quotation "There is corn in Egypt"

BEHIND THE SCENES

Managing the Trails

In the beginning, three volunteers managed the Kolapore Trails informally, and the University of Toronto Outing Club assumed official responsibility in 1976. Over the next decade, a core group of UTOC members worked hard on the trails and wanted more direct control. In 1986, an arrangement was made allowing UTOC's Kolapore Trails Committee to manage the trails independently and hold a separate bank account. Legally, the trails were still the responsibility of UTOC, and trail activities were covered by the UTOC insurance policy. Costs to manage the trails were relatively low – mostly building materials and tools – and were covered through map sales and the occasional donation.

The Trails Committee worked reasonably well because several longtime volunteers provided continuity well beyond their student years. However, in the late 1990s, the structure started to fray because there were fewer volunteers from UTOC, and there was a need for more local involvement.

In August 2004, UTOC and several other parties were sued by a mountain biker who had fallen while riding on the trails. This forced everyone to rethink the way the trails were managed and insured. Committee members decided that it would be inappropriate to change their organization while the lawsuit was in progress. It was eventually dropped.

After much planning and consultation with trail supporters, the Kolapore Wilderness Trails Association was incorporated as a not-for-profit corporation in March 2011. The Association's bylaws established a Board of five Directors, who are elected by the members at each Annual General Meeting. The Board manages all aspects of the trails, assisted by other volunteers in key roles.

Funds are raised through memberships, map sales and donations. Costs have increased because insurance is paid by KWTA. The Association also began funding a portable toilet at the main parking lot. In 2014, Grey County stopped plowing that lot and KWTA added that to its budget – an amount that has soared recently due to increased insurance premiums for snow plow operators.



Managing the Trails

Every year, many volunteers attend one or more trail work days to help with tasks like pruning, blazing, ditch digging, hauling materials, and building bridges and boardwalks. Tools are provided and no experience is necessary except for crew leaders. Calls for trail volunteers go out in member newsletters and on social media. To be added to the volunteer email list, please write info@kolaporetrails.org.



Our Landowners

Over 90% of the trails are located on lands owned by four public agencies: the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR), Ontario Parks, Grey County and Grey Sauble Conservation Authority. Dealing with a small number of landowners has made things simpler although there have been occasional bureaucratic requirements. MNR and Grey County have been particularly supportive. MNR funded construction of parking lots on Grey Road 2 and the 10th Line, and has loaned summer staff to work on trail projects in a number of years. Grey County plowed the Kolapore Uplands parking lot for many years and recently funded the construction and plowing of a new parking lot at the east end of the County Forest. The trails also cross lands owned by the Bruce Trail Conservancy and seven private landowners. All trail users should be grateful for the support that these landowners have shown – some of them for decades.





Bridge Building 1977



The Safety Cache



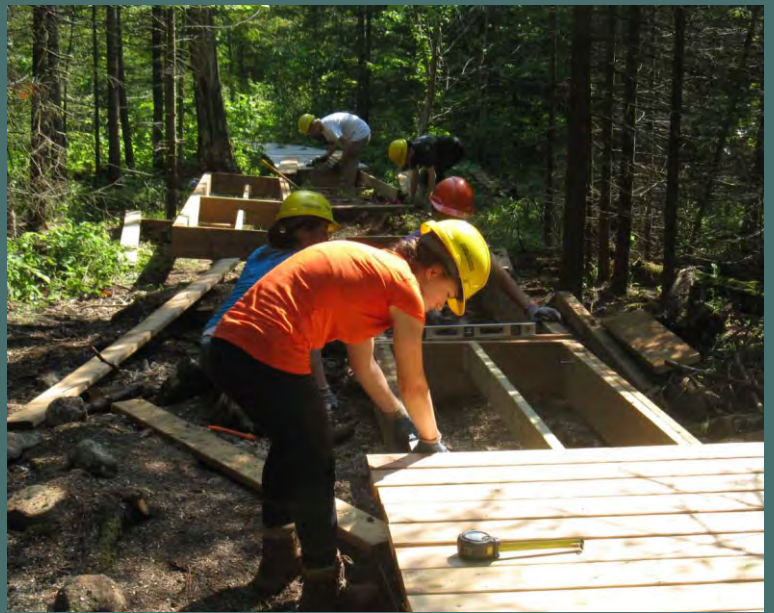
Bridge trail to summit 1978



Bridge work at Red Death 1983



Bridgework 2010



MNR Crew building a boardwalk



David Glen, Portaging lumber 2010



Brockwalk ribbon-cutting, 2015



GLIMPSES OF HISTORY

1960s to Today - The University of Toronto Outing Club Cabin

The rustic UTOC Cabin beneath Metcalfe Rock was built by club members in 1968 as a base for students and their friends to enjoy downhill skiing, caving, rock climbing and hiking. It was here that the idea of the Kolapore Wilderness Trails was conceived. Even today, the Cabin has no electricity and is lit by propane lamps and heated by a wood-burning stove. There is no indoor plumbing - just an outhouse and water hauled from a nearby stream. Guests bring sleeping bags and sleep in long rows on foam pads.

Groups of up to 25 people have enjoyed many summer and winter weekends at the Cabin. During the 1970s and 1980s, a strong core of dedicated UTOC members spent countless hours working together on the Kolapore trails. Dozens of friendships - and even marriages - that began at the Cabin and on the trails have continued to this day. Many UTOC members from that era still feel a strong connection with Kolapore, no matter where they live in the world. UTOC is now a not-for-profit outdoor club that has no affiliation with the University. Although they no longer have any formal relationship with the Kolapore Wilderness Trails, Cabin visitors continue to enjoy the trails regularly.

1980s - Trail Safety: Nordic Ski Patrol, Trail Guides and Safety Caches

Kolapore trail managers have always prioritized safety in trail design, inspections, maintenance, signage, mapping and recent bridge improvements. They have also considered ways to help trail users who encounter problems – particularly cross-country skiers, who use the trails in cold weather when the sun sets early. In recent years, safety strategies have been influenced by improved ski equipment and the increased use of digital mapping and cell phones.

In the 1980s, a Kolapore Nordic ski patrol was established, affiliated with the Canadian Ski Patrol System. It was led by Richard Ellen, and other members included Rosemary Czirfusz, Johnny Chong, Jeff Gibson and Brian Judge. These volunteers had to pass the rigorous annual first aid and winter rescue certification that is mandatory for all ski patrollers. Patrol members carried first aid and ski repair kits, brackets for transforming skis into instant toboggans, waxes, food, water and Kolapore maps. They helped establish and supply a few safety caches near the trails.

Yet the good intentions were not realized. The network was too extensive to patrol and to “sweep” at day’s end. Patrollers encountered very few injured skiers, and there was no way for people to contact them for help. The most common safety issues involved skiers who had lost their way or become exhausted too far from their vehicle, unable to ski out before sundown. Rarely was there any need for the type of emergency aid that the Canadian Ski Patrol focussed on.

As a result, the local ski patrol was converted to a new corps of “Trail Guides”. Since 1986, the Trail Guides have skied in their distinctive red bibs, offering skiers advice about appropriate routes, distances, waxes and weather/darkness reminders. The Guides also sell trail maps and help with trail maintenance. Some of the Trail Guides are still wearing their original bibs from the 1980s. KWTA could use a few new volunteers who enjoy skiing long distances because some of the veteran Trail Guides don’t ski as far as they used to. On the other hand, they get to ski more often now that they’re retired!



Late 1980s, Early 1990s - The Arrival of Mountain Biking

Originally, the Kolapore trails were expected to be used almost exclusively for skiing with very limited hiking. This was true until the late 1980s and early 1990s when mountain biking use increased dramatically. Initially, Kolapore volunteers discouraged it because of the impacts on trails that hadn't been designed for bikes. However, it soon became clear that skiers and mountain bikers would need to work together to share and care for the trails they all loved.



In 1993, the Kolapore Trails Committee met with local mountain bikers, who were represented by Rob Cook of the Ontario Cycling Association's mountain bike advocacy subcommittee. Together, they visited portions of the trails where summer use was causing the most damage. There were three main outcomes:

- Creation of a mountain biking code of conduct
- Recruitment of trail work volunteers from the mountain biking community
- Designation of portions of Southern Crossing, Quiet Pastures and Trail to the Summit trails for "winter use only" due to their sensitivity.

Sadly, Rob Cook died a few years later and the connection with the mountain biking community diminished until the mid-2000s, when mountain bikers started to become an integral part of the Kolapore trail community. KWTA's current members and trail volunteers include local mountain bikers, and the Association values its relationship with the Collingwood Offroad Cycling Club (CORC).

2010s and early 2020s - Building a Trails Association

The dream for the new Kolapore Wilderness Trails Association was never just about incorporating a new legal entity. The KWTA wanted to build a community of fellow trail lovers who would support the year-round management of the trails. Before 2011, there had been periodic meetings of supporters and a mailing list of people who received the annual Trail News. When the KWTA was formed, it became a member-based organization with a fee to join. This allowed trail managers to communicate regularly with members and offer more social events to foster connections and create a sense of community.

These events started with potluck dinners that were followed by moonlight skis, and “Soup and Ski” days. Next came mountain bike rides with a pizza lunch, member walks including “Hidden Kolapore”, and “Introduction to Kolapore” events. The Annual General Meeting changed from a pure business session to a meeting followed by a potluck dinner. Although these successful events were constrained during the pandemic, they will be back.

During the 50th Anniversary year, the KWTA presented a new series of Heritage Walks with themes such as birds, plants, geology, trees and trail history. They were very well attended and showed how much interest there is in Kolapore’s natural values.



2020s – Designated Snowshoe Trails

The Kolapore Trails have always been designated for cross-country skiing only in winter. Snowshoeing isn't allowed because the deep tracks destroy the ski tracks and create safety issues for skiers. Snowshoeing is permitted on the nearby Bruce Trail, which passes through the north part of Kolapore. To provide further options for snowshoers, KWTA volunteers have established separate snowshoe trails at each of the three main parking lots. These popular trails have improved the experience for both skiers and snowshoers.

NATURAL HERITAGE

of the Kolapore Uplands

Many longtime users of the Kolapore trails believe the area is special, and independent researchers agree. In 1996, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources released “Ecological Survey of the Niagara Escarpment”, which was based on 25 years of ecological research. The report presented a “science-based identification of the outstanding natural areas along the Niagara Escarpment”. Five sites within the Kolapore Uplands were identified and three were noted as being provincially significant:

- **Kolapore Escarpment** (1570 acres) including the Kolapore Church, Marc’s Folly, Paradise Highway and Wild Mouse trails area
- **Duncan Crevice Caves** (40 acres)
- **Kolapore Swamp** (1025 acres), immediately east of the main Kolapore parking lot, not on the trail system.

Two sites were identified as being regionally significant: Mitchell (Mill) Creek Valley (280 acres) and Kolapore Southwest (825 acres). The report’s comments about the Kolapore Escarpment area, which is visited by many trail users, are particularly interesting: “[It] is one of the largest, most diverse and least disturbed natural areas in the central portion of the Niagara Escarpment, with excellent representation of rich sugar maple forests on the Banks Moraine, Niagara Escarpment cliff, crevice and talus communities and wetlands, including rich mixed swamps.”

Over 525 plant species were recorded in the three provincially significant sites: “...this is one of the highest totals for any area along the Niagara Escarpment.” In addition, 91 breeding bird species were recorded, 26 of them “forest-interior” species. All of these findings highlight the ecological significance of the Kolapore Uplands area.

GEOLOGY

The Kolapore Uplands has an impressive assortment of geological features. Beth Gilhespy’s recently published book “Walking Through Time – Exploring Niagara Escarpment Geology in the Beaver Valley Bruce Trail Section” states that the best geology walk in the whole Beaver Valley area is in the northwest corner of the Kolapore Uplands. The area has it all: “beautiful views, great geological features, crevice caves, and the full suite of Niagara Escarpment rock layers found in the Beaver Valley.”

A study carried out by geologists from the Ministry of Natural Resources in the early 1990s identified a large portion of the Kolapore Uplands as a provincially significant earth science area. This was based on the excellent representation of features related to the Niagara Escarpment – rock layers deposited about 450 to 420 million years ago.

In addition, the study highlighted the presence of part of the Banks Moraine, which marks the most southerly advance of ice sheets during the last glaciation. (The Banks Moraine is the ridge that runs just north of the central part of Kolapore Church trail.)

Special geological features include several “bioherms” which had their origin as coral reefs in the warm salt-water sea that covered the area. Over millions of years the coral and algae turned into rock (dolostone) that was harder than the surrounding rock. Later action by glaciers has eroded away the adjacent softer rocks. Probably the best example of a bioherm in the area is Mount Dhoulagiri.

WILDLIFE

of the Kolapore Uplands

Kolapore's wildlife mostly keeps to itself but trail users and nearby residents occasionally see animals typical of wilderness areas.

BLACK BEARS

Black Bears are uncommon but people have encountered them in Kolapore over the years. There have been a number of minor incidents around nearby homes, usually when a bear was seeking food. In Spring 2023, a bear was sighted on the 10th Line in Little Germany, and several years ago, a local hunter captured images of a bear with cubs on their field cam.

FISHERS

In 2021, Fishers were sighted in the Kolapore Uplands - both on the trails and as roadkill. Fishers are one of the larger members of the weasel family and are perhaps best known for being the only animal that regularly preys on porcupines. Fishers had become locally extinct in much of southern Ontario but populations are re-establishing in areas that have relatively large amounts of forest cover, like Kolapore.

COYOTES

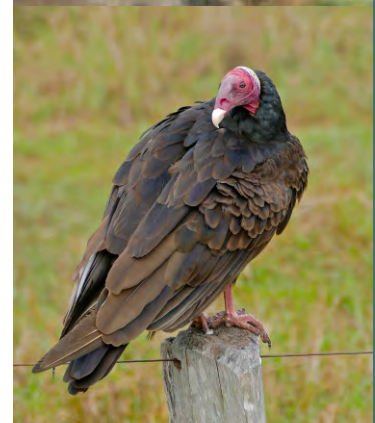
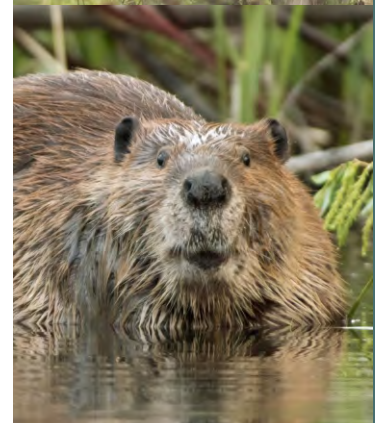
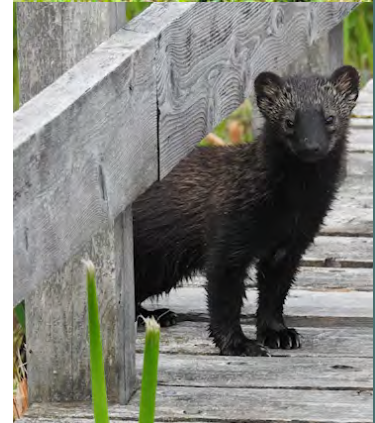
Coyotes are regularly heard howling in the night, however, they are seldom seen. They aren't native to Ontario; they spread from western Canada in the early 20th Century and are a hybrid of western coyote and eastern wolf. They remain predominantly like their western relatives in size and behaviour.

BEAVERS

When the trails were created in the early 1970s, there was little Beaver activity in the area so there were fewer wet areas to manage. Subsequently, the beaver population rebounded, which led to an ongoing struggle to maintain some trails. In many locations, bridges and boardwalks have needed to be raised or lengthened, in some cases repeatedly. There are several locations where beavers don't seem to be as active now as they were previously, such as John's Portage and the Gulch area, and KWTA has no explanation for the change.

TURKEY VULTURES

One of the most common bird sightings in the Kolapore area is a large black bird gracefully soaring in the air. This is known as the unofficial "official bird of Kolapore" – the turkey vulture. Watching them in the air, where they rarely flap their wings as they ride the thermal updrafts, they are beautiful birds. When seen on the ground with their naked red heads while eating carrion, they are somewhat less appealing. Turkey vultures like the Kolapore area because they often roost on rock faces, and the Niagara Escarpment provides plenty of habitat.



THE NEXT 50 YEARS

and beyond

While celebrating our 50th Anniversary, we also need to think about the future and what we need to do to sustain both the trails and the special land they traverse.

The Kolapore Trails will face some significant challenges in the coming years. An obvious one is climate change, which has already started to shrink the ski season. From a trail perspective, we are trying to adapt to this change by moving trails out of wet areas, installing culverts and building more boardwalks so that we do not need to rely on frozen ground conditions. Recently, we have started to remove some of the rocks that are “ski gougers”, but there is a limit to how much of this can be done.

Reduced skiing could mean less support from members of the ski community, who have traditionally been the majority of Kolapore volunteers and donors - although that has started to change in recent years. Another challenge is ensuring that the trails are sustainable, both physically and financially. Greater summer use has resulted in increased erosion, and volunteers have started to work on this but more needs to be done. The costs of managing the trails are increasing, and the membership base is declining after a pandemic boom. Paper map sales have been a significant revenue source in the past, but that is shrinking. KWTA will need to encourage more donations and is exploring the possibility of charitable status.



Like most volunteer organizations, KWTA has challenges with recruiting enough people to help. There are several longtime volunteers whose roles need to be transitioned to others soon. Fortunately, we have recruited a number of new volunteers for “on the ground” work in recent years. We need to continue to build and expand our expertise in trail and bridge building.

Along with challenges, the future brings opportunities. The enthusiastic response to the 50th Anniversary Heritage Hikes showed there is substantial interest in the Kolapore Uplands area beyond just the trails. With volunteer support, KWTA could continue these types of educational events and find other ways of making visitors aware of how special and valuable the area is.

KWTA could take on some type of broader land stewardship role in the area, in conjunction with other partners. There is also an opportunity for greater youth involvement in trail events and volunteer projects to encourage the next generation of trail stewards.

The Kolapore Trails have come a long way in 50 years, but this has only been the first chapter. With support from members, volunteers and donors, we look forward to continuing our journey!



GRATITUDE

Land Acknowledgment

We acknowledge with respect the history, spirituality, and culture of the Anishinaabek, Six Nations of the Grand River, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat-Wyandot-Wyandotte peoples, whose ancestors signed Treaties with our ancestors and on whose traditional territories the Kolapore Wilderness Trails lie. We acknowledge a historical shared presence of Indigenous nations throughout this area and recognize its original, Indigenous inhabitants as the stewards of its lands and waters since time immemorial. We thank all the generations of people who have cared for the Kolapore Uplands. May we all share this land with honour and respect, and learn from one another so we may better grow together.

Celebrating Lifelong Volunteer Commitment to the Kolapore Trails

When an organization celebrates its 50th Anniversary, it is almost unheard of that any volunteer has been involved for all that time. For a trail network, where volunteer interest can be tied to physical fitness, this is even more improbable. However, Bruce King – one of the founders of the Kolapore Trails in 1973 – currently serves as the KWTA President!

Each year, Bruce spends many hours on the trails with a shovel and pruners. Over the five decades, he has attended hundreds of meetings, written countless letters and emails, managed landowner and organization relationships, planned trail work, deposited cheques, produced trail newsletters, hosted member events at his home, and posted ski condition reports – and that's just the tip of the iceberg!

The challenging and scenic Kingsway Trail was built in 1989 and named for Bruce. Rather than accepting that honour as a Lifetime Achievement Award, Bruce just sharpened his pruners and kept on working. In 2023, Bruce and his wife Val Jones – also a major contributor to the Kolapore Trails over many years – were presented jointly with the Town of the Blue Mountains Volunteer Recognition Award for Sports and Recreation. We can never thank Bruce and Val enough for their huge contribution.

Thank you!

Over the past fifty years, the Kolapore Wilderness Trails have benefited from the time and generosity of countless people and organizations. The KWTA does not own land and receives no government funding. We are deeply grateful to the landowners who allow our trails to pass through their properties and to individual donors who provide funds and materials. The trails couldn't exist without the volunteers who prune branches, build boardwalks, clear fallen trees, carry heavy loads and mark the trails. We're also indebted to the volunteers who serve on our board, plan events, pay our bills and post on social media. Last but not least, thank you to all the Members and supporters of the Kolapore Wilderness Trails, past and present. We have a lot to celebrate together!



